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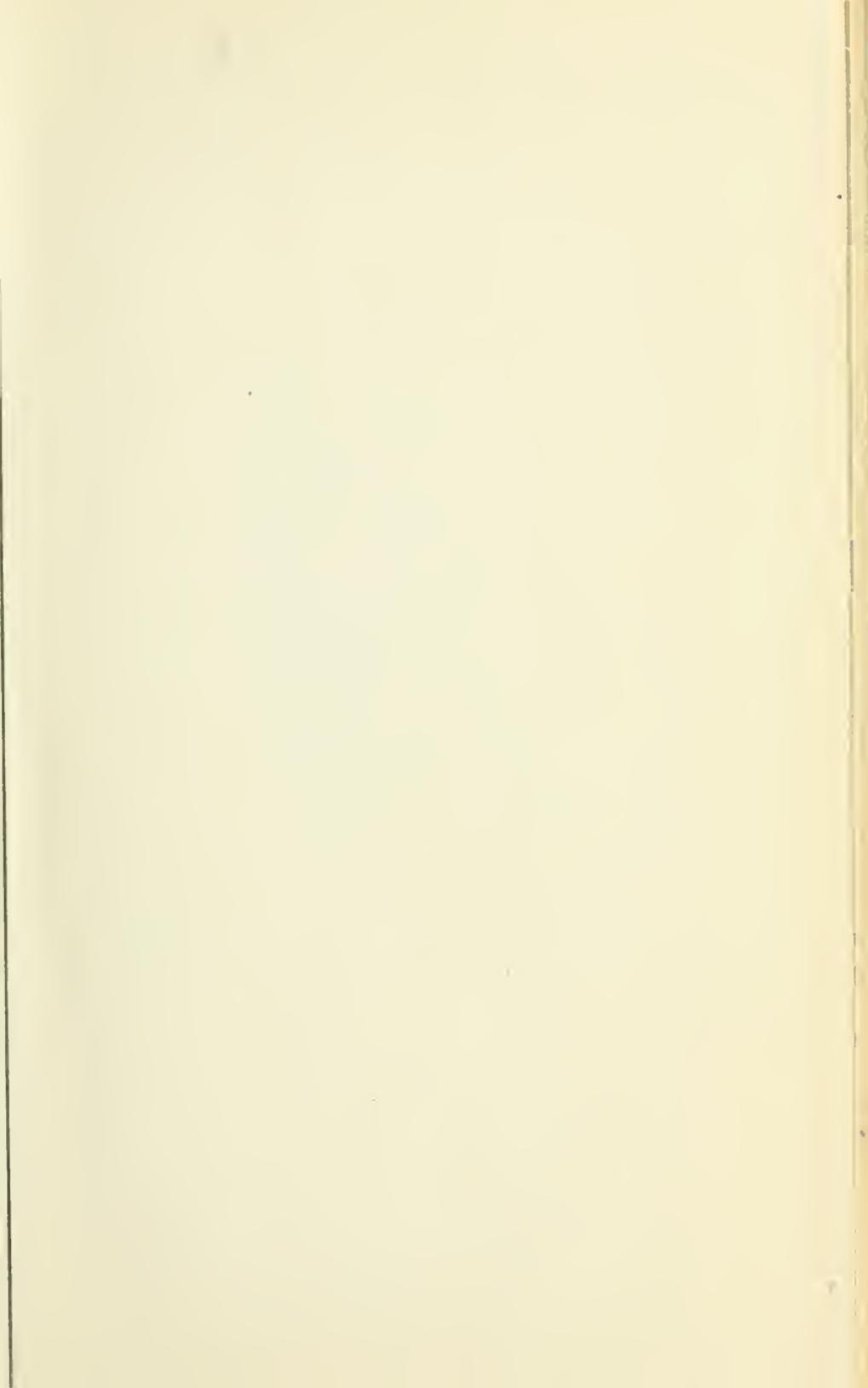


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WALT WHITMAN

AND

LEAVES OF GRASS

AN INTRODUCTION

BY
W. H. TRIMBLE

"Let a man but speak forth with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition of his own heart; and other men, so strangely are we all knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him."—*Carlyle*.

WATTS & CO.,

17 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

1905

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The references in this volume to Whitman's writings
are to :—

Leaves of Grass, including: "Sands at Seventy";
"Good-Bye, My Fancy"; "Old-Age Echoes"; and
"A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads." (Boston
Small, Maynard, & Co., 1898.)

AND

Complete Prose Works: "Specimen Days and Collect";
"November Boughs"; and "Good-Bye, My Fancy."
(Boston: Small, Maynard, & Co., 1898.)

The following pages have been compiled from a series
of lectures given in Dunedin in the winter of 1903.

*Dunedin, New Zealand,
November, 1904.*

I.

EARLY YEARS

WALT WHITMAN, the author of *Leaves of Grass*, known to his friends and admirers as the "Good Grey Poet," the "Poet of Hope," and the "Laureate of Democracy," was born on May 31st, 1819, at West Hills, near Huntingdon, Suffolk County, Long Island, in the State of New York, where his father was a farmer and carpenter.

The Whitman family had been settled in Long Island since about 1650: the Van Velsors—the family of the poet's mother—were also old settlers on Long Island, having been located there about as long as the Whitmans.

The Van Velsor people were noted for fine horses, which the men bred and train'd from blood stock. My mother, as a young woman, was a daily and daring rider.¹

The first five years of the future poet's life were spent in the country; but in 1824 his parents moved into Brooklyn, where the boy Walt received such rudimentary education as was procurable at that time.

It was here that he—

assisted the personal coming of Lafayette, in 1824-25, to Brooklyn.....Numerous children arrived on the grounds, of whom I was one, and were assisted by several gentlemen to safe spots to view the ceremony. Among others,

¹ *Prose*, p. 5.

Lafayette, also helping the children, took me up—I was five years old—press'd me a moment to his breast, gave me a kiss, and set me down in a safe spot.¹

About 1832 Whitman was apprenticed to the printing trade in the office of the *Long Island Patriot*. Later he worked on the *Long Island Star*. In 1836-7 we find him working as a compositor in New York.² His connection with the Press throughout his life is detailed in an early issue of the *Camden Courier*, the paragraph being reprinted in *Specimen Days*.³

When about seventeen years old, Whitman took up the occupation of itinerant school teacher in Suffolk and Queen's counties, Long Island. Of this period of his life he wrote: "This I consider one of my best experiences, and deepest lessons in human nature, behind the scenes and in the masses."⁴ The short story which he wrote in 1841, *Death in the School Room*,⁵ is probably based on some tragic experience of this time.

In 1839, '40, I started and publish'd a weekly paper in my native town, Huntingdon. Then, returning to New York and Brooklyn, worked on as printer and writer; mostly prose; but an occasional shy at "poetry."⁶

Some of Whitman's writings of this period, principally short stories, are printed in his collected *Prose Works*, under the heading of *Pieces in Early Youth*.

The years 1846, '47, and there along, see me still in New York city, working as writer and printer; having my usual good health, and a good time generally.⁷

During these years Whitman availed himself of every possible opportunity of becoming acquainted

¹ *Prose*, p. 510.

² *Ibid*, p. 10.

³ *Ibid*, p. 187.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 336.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 12; and see an excellent article, "Walt Whitman as an Editor," in the *Atlantic Monthly*, November, 1903.

with labouring people of all descriptions and occupations. To the end of his life he delighted in the workers. His ideal citizen is to be a worker, a producer: his *Great City* is not to include idlers or parasites. He appears to have spent a good deal of his spare time on the New York street cars, the drivers of which impressed him very profoundly. Speaking of Whitman's sojourn in Washington in the early seventies, Peter Doyle said :—

Everybody knew him. He had a way of taking the measure of the driver's hands—had calf-skin gloves made for them every winter in Georgetown—these gloves were his personal presents to the men. He saluted the men on the other cars as we passed, threw up his hand. They cried to him "Hullo, Walt," and he would reply, "Ah, there," or something like it. He was welcome always as the flowers in May. Everybody appreciated his attentions, and he seemed to appreciate our attentions to him.¹

I suppose the critics will laugh heartily; but the influence of those Broadway omnibus jaunts, and drivers, and declamations, and escapades, undoubtedly enter'd into the gestation of *Leaves of Grass*.²

The poet's love of the street cars survived into his old age. Mr. Donaldson tells us that up to the time of his last illness Whitman delighted in riding in the cars in Philadelphia.

With his back to the car, his feet on the fender, and cane in hand, he would enjoy this ride of eight miles or more, watching the passers-by, but seldom speaking during the ride.....Finally, Mr. Whitman became known on the line as "Whitman, the Camden Poet." All the drivers liked him, but thought him *odd*.³

And there is a very interesting anecdote of the poet

¹ *Calamus*; *Letters to Peter Doyle*. ² *Prose*, p. 13.

³ *Walt Whitman the Man*.

during his residence in Washington, prior to 1873, of his taking charge of a street car so as to give the conductor a rest, and at the same time holding and pacifying a tired, and therefore cross, baby-passenger for a worn-out mother.¹

In the same early years Whitman developed a passion for the ferry between New York and Brooklyn.

My life then, and still more the following years, was curiously identified with Fulton Ferry, already becoming the greatest of its sort in the world for general importance, volume, variety, rapidity, and picturesqueness. Almost daily, later ('50-'60), crossed on the boats, often up in the pilot-houses, where I could get a full sweep, absorbing shows, accompaniments, surroundings.....Indeed, I have always had a passion for ferries ; to me they afford inimitable, streaming, never-failing, living poems.²

Mr. Donaldson mentions that in his old age Whitman used to derive great enjoyment from the ferry trip between Philadelphia and Camden. This passion for the river doubtless inspired many of his finest lines, notably *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*.

Another influence of these years over Whitman's life, writings, and character was the Fire Brigade of New York. Although he made no reference, in *Specimen Days*, to the great fire of 1835 in New York, yet he must have entertained lively recollections of that catastrophe, which possibly inspired the following lines in the *Song of Myself* :—

"I am the mash'd fireman, with breast-bone broken ;
Tumbling walls buried me in their *débris* ;
Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my
comrades ;
I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels ;

¹ *Birds and Poets*, by John Burroughs.

² *Prose*, p. 11.

They have cleared the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth ;
I lie in the night air in my red shirt, the pervading hush is for my
sake ;

Painless after all I lie exhausted, but not so unhappy ;
White and beautiful are the faces around me ; the heads are bared
of their fire-caps ;
The kneeling crowd fades with the light of the torches.”¹

The following lines from *A Song of Joys* (1860) also bear upon the same theme :—

“ O, the fireman’s joys !
I hear the alarm at dead of night ;
I hear bells, shouts ! I pass the crowd ; I run !
The sight of the flames maddens me with pleasure ! ”²

Emerson said he first met Whitman in New York, in 1855, and asked him to dine with him at the Astor House. He came, and at dinner, instead of drinking out of a glass, called for a tin cup. He then took Emerson to an engine-house, and showed him the conveniences there for the firemen to sit, or read, or chat with one another, and praised the companionship of the men.³

In these same years, also, Whitman revelled in the drama and in music, hearing all the best actors and musicians of the day. His reminiscences of the actors of that time, published in an essay entitled *The Old Bowery*,⁴ are exceedingly interesting. It may also be added that at that time Whitman was himself a member of an amateur dramatic company, “ and acted parts in it several times—second parts, as they were called.”⁵ The music he appreciated appears to have been of the light, operatic, voluptuous, dramatic order. In *Specimen Days*⁶ he enumerates the Italian operas he had witnessed, it being evident that in this direction lay his musical taste. “ I heard Albani every time

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 60.

² *Ibid*, p. 143.

³ F. B. Sanborn, in the *Arena*, December, 1895.

⁴ *Prose*, p. 426.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 518.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 13.

she sang in New York and vicinity."¹ He also speaks of Jenny Lind, who "had the most brilliant, captivating, popular musical style and expression of any one known."² A verse, published in 1860, *To a Certain Cantatrice*,³ is said to have been addressed to Madame Albani. Mr. Havelock Ellis wrote:—

The music he delighted in was simple and joyous melody, as in Rossini's operas.....That Whitman could have truly appreciated Beethoven, or understood Wagner's *Tannhauser*, is not conceivable.⁴

The experts and musicians of my present friends claim that the new Wagner and his pieces belong far more truly to me, and I to them, likely. But I was fed and bred under the Italian dispensation, and absorbed it, and doubtless show it.⁵

In *Specimen Days* Whitman expresses the delight with which he had listened to a performance of *Beethoven's Septette*; but this, so far as we can find, is his only mention of any classical music.⁶

In 1849 Whitman

went off on a leisurely journey and working expedition through all the middle States, and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Lived a while in New Orleans, and worked there on the editorial staff of the *Daily Crescent* newspaper. After a time, plodded back northward; up the Mississippi, and around to and by way of the great lakes, Michigan, Huron, and Erie, to Niagara Falls and lower Canada; finally returning through central New York, and down the Hudson, travelling altogether probably 8,000 miles this trip, to and fro.⁷

In 1887 the old poet wrote an article on his experiences of New Orleans in those days, which was printed in the *Picayune* newspaper (New Orleans).⁸

¹ *Prose*, p. 14.

² *Ibid*, p. 516.

³ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 16.

⁴ *The New Spirit*.

⁵ *Prose*, p. 515; and see *Angels' Wings*, by Edwin Carpenter.

⁶ *Prose*, p. 151.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 439.

From 1851 Whitman spent several years house-building in Brooklyn. Although this occupation was profitable, he found it too absorbing, and ultimately gave it up. He became possessed by a living impulse to build for eternity, not for mere time. He must build something infinitely greater than mere houses.

This was a feeling or ambition to articulate and faithfully express in literary and poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and æsthetic personality; in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America, and to exploit that personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book.¹

¹ *A Backward Glance*, etc.

II.

“LEAVES OF GRASS”

“One's self I sing, a simple separate person.”

WHITMAN'S experiences of life and of natural objects were to find expression in poetry of a new order.

He was moved to undertake this formidable poetic work by his sense of the great materials which America could offer for a really American poetry, and by his contempt for the current work of his compatriots.....Thus incited to poetic self-expression, Whitman [writes Mr. Conway] wrote on a sheet of paper, in large letters, these words :

MAKE THE WORK,

and fixed it above his table, where he could always see it while writing. Thenceforth every cloud that flitted over him, every distant sail, every face and form encountered, wrote a line in his book.¹

Leaves of Grass, indeed (I cannot too often reiterate), has mainly been the outcropping of my own emotional and other personal nature—an attempt, from first to last, to put a *Person*, a human being (myself, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in America), freely, fully, and truly on record. I could not find any similar personal record in current literature that satisfied me. But it is not on *Leaves of Grass* distinctively as *literature*, or a specimen thereof, that I feel to dwell, or advance claims. *No one will get at my verses who insists upon viewing them as a literary performance, or as aiming mainly toward art, or æstheticism.*²

¹ Prefatory notice, by W. M. Rossetti, to *Poems by Walt Whitman*.

² *A Backward Glance*, etc.; the italics of the last sentence are ours.

This passage may be taken as explanatory of much that appears objectionable (in many ways) in Whitman's writings.

Whitman named his book after the grass, "which makes a carpet over the earth, and which is a sign and a presence rather than a form."¹

Of the matter contained in *Leaves of Grass* Whitman wrote :—

"This is the grass that grows wherever the land is, and the water is ;
This is the common air that bathes the globe."²

Whitman began this work in 1853.

In 1855 commenced putting *Leaves of Grass* to press for good.....after many MS. doings and undoings (I had great trouble in leaving out the stock "poetical" touches, but succeeded at last).³

It has not been our fortune to see a copy of the first issue of *Leaves of Grass*; the few existing copies (out of an edition of but a thousand) are greatly prized by collectors. In March, 1903, a correspondent in Philadelphia wrote : "I do not know where a first edition of *Leaves of Grass* can be secured; the last copy sold brought sixty-five dollars." Of the fate of this first issue Mr. Donaldson tells us :—

One day at our table he detailed at length how he had himself set up, printed, and gotten out his first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855; and that, at the time, he was engaged in building small houses, and making money at it. I asked him how much he made out of the book. He gave a quiet chuckle, and replied : "Made ? well, if I remember correctly, those persons to whom I sent them returned them all but four or five, and the rest I prevailed on friends and relatives, who could not refuse, to take away by hand. Oh, as a money matter, the book was a dreadful failure."⁴

¹ Whitman : *A Study*, by John Burroughs.

² *Leaves of Grass*, p. 43.

³ *Prose*, p. 15.

⁴ *Walt Whitman the Man*.

Nor need we, however great our admiration of the work, feel the least surprise at the hostility and indifference which Whitman's book encountered. How many of us, of a later generation, with the battle of the perpetual Whitman controversy fresh in our minds, and with every wish to read and welcome the works of a strange writer, have accepted Whitman at the first reading, or even been able to read his works at sight? In the reading public of his own day he had to contend with the indifference of the general reader, the abuse of the respectable and inevitable Mrs. Grundy, the dissuasions of his friends—in fact, on every hand he encountered discouragement.

In his style of writing Whitman had little or nothing in common with either contemporary poets or those of previous times; for he abandoned the time-honoured customs of rhyme and metre, leaving his words to find their own rhythm. This is really the supreme difficulty one is apt to experience when first attempting to read *Leaves of Grass*, for this rhythm is not always easy to grasp.

To the music of the opera, for which he had a passion, more than to anything else, was due his emancipation from what he called the "ballad style" of poetry; by which he meant poetry hampered by rhyme and metre. "But for the opera," he declared that day on Prospect Hill, "I could never have written *Leaves of Grass*."¹

This of course may account, to a great extent, for the recitative form of Whitman's poems; he recognised, probably, in recitative a basic principle of expression which would lead him into attempting to express his thoughts in the rhythm of nature, the sighing of the wind, the rustling of trees, the beating

¹ J. T. Trowbridge, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1902.

and restlessness of waves upon the shore; and, probably, it is only in the woods, "or back of a rock in the open air," or by the sea, that Whitman's writings can be properly understood, or their beauty appreciated. These, and other—similar—comparisons with natural processes and objects have been frequently used as analogies with the spirit and rhythm of *Leaves of Grass*; but although, to many readers, they may appear fanciful and extravagant, we do not know, and cannot think, of any others, and they are here set down for what they are worth, and because, to a very great extent, we regard them as true. Before *Leaves of Grass* can be read and understood this peculiar rhythm must be mastered, or the lines appear to be "without form, and void"; but, when once mastered, this rhythm appears to be perfect—indeed, the discerning reader will almost feel disposed to doubt whether the material of the book could have been expressed better, or even in any other manner; from being obscure, the poems become fascinating. However unequal in length the lines may be (and on opening the book at random we have encountered a line of nineteen "feet" followed by one of fifty-one), they always seem to us as though they could in no wise be improved upon. All the poems breathe a sentiment of subdued melancholy; he is always conscious of "that sobbing dirge of Nature"; in this respect, and also in respect of their entire lack of humour (for we cannot conscientiously call that gruesome *Boston Ballad* humorous), many readers have recognised in *Leaves of Grass* a great primitive poem.

Whitman has been accused of unadulterated egotism, and certainly his continual use of the Ego frequently appears to give colour to this charge; but a little study

will show the discerning reader that the Ego is used vicariously, and that the pronoun *You* might have been used with equal propriety. Whitman asserts this at the beginning of the *Song of Myself* :—

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself ;
And what I assume you shall assume ;
For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you."

There was no egotism in Whitman. There was the consciousness of great personal power. He exerted this power to general, not personal, ends. If he said "I," was it not equally the part and duty of every other to say "I," and to make for themselves all the claims he could make for himself ? He would not only say for himself "I and my father are one," but he would insist that it was necessary for the perfection of his claim that he should also say "You and your father are one," and that *you* should say "I and my father are one."¹

In his manner Whitman is occasionally obscure ; in much of his earlier work there is an arrogant, even insolent, note, which the reader is apt to find rather irritating ; and in some of his poems he inserted long catalogues of occupations, articles, and so forth, which are rather trying to the reader's patience.² Also, he frequently uses uncouth expressions ; and at times he even goes so far as to manufacture words.³ He also intrudes foreign words into his writings where English ones would be equally (or more) suitable ; a favourite expression is "Camerado" (corrupted, apparently, by himself from the Spanish *camarada*), which he substitutes for the much more appropriate and expressive English word "comrade."

¹ Horace L. Traubel, in the *Arena*, January, 1896.

² The "catalogues" are justified to some extent by Mr. Salter, Professor Dowden, and Mr. Burroughs.

³ "Even in Whitman's best work there is constantly some rudeness that jars, as if a piece of glass had got into our bread."—Prof. Nichol.

Whitman's punctuation, also, is open to hostile criticism ; he evidently had but a faint conception of the use and value of the semicolon ; his perpetual commas lead the reader into confusion, and add to the difficulty of getting at his meanings ; and his use of the parenthesis is much too frequent. His inspiration was intermittent ; and often, in attempting to be forcible in his language, he only succeeded in being feeble. Some of his early work he subsequently ruined with alterations which are distinctly inferior to what Professor Nichol calls the "original scrawl." He even entirely omitted some of the early pieces from the final "authorised" edition of *Leaves of Grass* ; some of these, notably *Great are the Myths*, are particularly fine, and Whitman's reason for dropping them can only be matter for conjecture.

We are aware that there are many readers of Whitman who regard *Leaves of Grass* as above criticism, and as artistically faultless ; and it will appear, from the foregoing remarks, that we do not ourselves take that position ; but, numerous and reprehensible as Whitman's faults may be, these are merely trifles when placed in contrast with his many excellent qualities. We do not need, here, to make more than a passing allusion to Whitman's unlimited breadth of view : that is the first, as well as the finest, of his characteristics that the student will immediately notice for himself ; and, as a matter of course, this is one of the characteristics of *Leaves of Grass* which gives great offence to the redoubtable Mrs. Grundy : that respectable old party does not approve of breadth of view.

"I inhale great draughts of space,"

says Whitman ; but the poor old lady cannot but

suspect that this is an impropriety. This *Cosmic Sense* leads Whitman to recognise that man is his "own master, total and absolute"; and to his rather startling announcement that the *Great City* is "where the men and women think lightly of the laws,"¹ and "where the children are taught to be laws to themselves, and to depend on themselves":² and this brings us to his ideal of Democracy, the fruition of which will depend entirely upon the development of each man's and each woman's individuality:—

"Underneath all, individuals;
I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals;
The only government is that which makes minute of individuals;
The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly to one
single individual—namely, to You."³

Whitman's intense sympathy with all sorrow and suffering is evident throughout his writings, and was abundantly exemplified in his devotion to the sick and wounded of both sides (North and South) during the American war. We must also add that Whitman possessed a curious facility for making his readers aware of the objects of the universe as if for the first time; the world is every hour a new Garden of Eden; and we are the new Adam and Eve, looking upon nature, and ourselves, and one another, as though newly sprung from the inane. From this attitude we are made to regard the most common-place natural objects with astonishment at their beauty:—

"A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books.

"I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of the stars;

¹ *Song of the Broad Axe.* ² *Ibid.* ³ *By Blue Ontario's Shore.*

And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg
of the wren.

"And the running blackberry would adorn the parlours of heaven.

"And the cow, crunching with depress'd head, surpasses any statue;
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels."¹

The poems are a constant and intimate appeal "to you, whoever you are"; to each "simple, separate person" with whom the poet comes into contact; he and his readers, therefore, appear to be bound together by a personal tie; hence the contention of some enthusiastic admirers that Whitman must be accepted *in toto* or rejected. The reader who recognises the force of this personal feeling will realise the meaning of the lines:—

"Camarado! this is no book!
Who touches this, touches a man."²

He wrote a great book. Yet he insisted by this very book, and in all private mention of it, that he could not be understood until the man back of the book had been embraced.³

If Whitman was more unfortunate in one respect than another, it was in the titles he gave to his poems. This fault was due, we think, to the thought that it is the character of a man that is of consequence, not his mere name. But although this is quite true of a man, it certainly is not so of a book, or of a poem. In a great number of instances (for there are exceptions) the names given to his poems by Whitman were merely their first few words—*e.g.*, *Starting from Paumanok*; *Aboard at a Ship's Helm*; *First, O Songs for a Prelude*; *Great Are The Myths*, etc. Fortu-

¹ *Song of Myself*. ² *Leaves of Grass*, p. 282.

³ Horace L. Traubel, in the *Arena*, January, 1896.

nately for British readers, the first English editor of a selection from *Leaves of Grass*, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, gave names of his own choosing—names which we would like to be perpetuated—to many of the poems. To the poem, *To Think of Time*, Mr. Rossetti gave the expressive, sombre, entirely appropriate title, *Burial* (a name which Whitman himself had originally given to the poem, but had subsequently dropped); *Whoever You Are, Holding Me Now In Hand*, Mr. Rossetti named *Fit Audience*; *There was a Child Went Forth* he named *Assimilations*, etc.¹

The themes dealt with in *Leaves of Grass* are usually classified under three headings, viz.:—

1. Human Freedom.
2. Human Brotherhood.
3. Death and Immortality.

The exclusively democratic poems are, of course, grouped under the first of these headings; the *Drum Taps* (songs inspired by the war) under all three; the *Songs of Sex* (most of which are known as *Children of Adam*) under the first and second. Were we to sort out the entire collection of poems, we would find that the whole of Whitman's poetry can be grouped under these three headings; for convenience we have, in this work, rather extended this classification, and made a further subdivision into six sections; giving the *Drum Taps* a chapter to themselves.

Whitman named his first volume of poems *Leaves of Grass*; from time to time he issued further series of poems, such as *Drum Taps*, *Sands at Serenity*, *Good-bye My Fancy*, all of which were eventually collected in a single volume, and published as *Leaves of Grass*.

¹ See Appendix No. 1.

1.—"SONG OF MYSELF."

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself."

THE most important, as well as the most valuable, of Whitman's poems is the *Song of Myself*¹—a long composition in fifty-two sections : in the first issue of *Leaves of Grass* this poem had no name assigned to it ; in later issues it was named *Walt Whitman* ; finally, the author named it the *Song of Myself*. Taking *Leaves of Grass* as the expression of Whitman's personality, this is the backbone of that personality, the other poems being merely collateral : this is the main trunk, the other poems being branches, twigs, foliage ; this is the central sun of the kosmos, the other poems being attendant, though important, satellites. Whitman's friend, Mr. John Burroughs, describes this poem as

a series of utterances, ejaculations, apostrophes, enumerations, associations, pictures, parables, incidents, suggestions, with little or no structural or logical connection ; but all emanating from a personality whose presence dominates the page, and whose eye is ever upon us.²

Whitman selected as his point of view some imaginary position in time and space, whence he viewed and reviewed the movements and history of physical creation. Dr. Bucke—Whitman's biographer, and one of his literary executors—claims for

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 29.

² *Whitman: A Study*, by John Burroughs.

Whitman that he was gifted with "Cosmic Consciousness," a sense which the majority of men do not yet possess, but which is the result of evolution, and which will, in course of time, in all probability, become general in mankind; and that it is from this position Whitman watches the processes of creation. Dr. Bucke described "Cosmic Consciousness" as "a clear conception, in outline, of the drift of the universe—a consciousness that the over-ruling power which resides in it is infinitely beneficent—a vision of the WHOLE, or at least of an immense WHOLE, which dwarfs all conception, imagination, or speculation, springing from or belonging to ordinary self-consciousness, making the old attempts to mentally grasp the universe and its meaning petty, and even ridiculous."¹

Dr. Bucke was of opinion that it was in this spirit Whitman wrote the lines:—

"Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
 that pass all the argument of the earth ;
 And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own ;
 And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own ;
 And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
 women my sisters and lovers ;
 And that a kelson of the creation is love."²

This is a very interesting theory, quite worthy of serious attention ; we cannot, however, pause to consider it further here.

From this station in the universe, or from this position of *Cosmic Consciousness*, Whitman looks down into the "huge first nothing," knowing that he "was even there."³

¹ In Re Walt Whitman. ² Leaves of Grass, p. 32. ³ Ibid, p. 71.

“Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen ;
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings ;
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me ;
Before I was born out of my mother generations guarded me ;
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.”¹

He looks at night at the “far-sprinkled systems” :—

“And all I see, multiplied as high as I can cipher, edge but the rim
of the farther systems ;
Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
Outward, and outward, and for ever outward.
My sun has his sun, and round him obediently wheels ;
He joins, with his partners, a group of superior circuit ;
And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest inside them.
There is no stoppage, and never can be stoppage :
If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their surfaces,
were this moment reduced back to a pallid float, it would not
avail in the long run ;
We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther.
A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not
hazard the span, or make it impatient ;
They are but parts, anything is but a part.
See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that ;
Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that.”²

He watches the “nebula cohere to an orb”; he sees
the globe cool down to the eras of “vast vegetables”
and “monstrous sauroids.”³

“All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me ;
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.”⁴

And again :—

“I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits,
grains, esculent roots ;
And am stucco’d with quadrupeds and birds all over ;
And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons ;
But call anything back again when I desire it.”⁵

We are now, after rapidly glancing over the pro-
cesses of physical creation, standing on *terra firma*.

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 72.

² *Ibid*, p. 73.

³ *Ibid*, p. 72.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 72.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 54.

“The earth, that is sufficient;
 I do not want the constellations any nearer ;
 I know they are very well where they are ;
 I know they suffice for those who belong to them.”¹

And the voyage through eternity of our “eloquent, dumb, great mother.”

“Tumbling on steadily, nothing dreading ;
 Sunshine, storm, cold, heat, forever notwithstanding, passing,
 carrying ;
 The soul’s realisation and determination still inheriting ;
 The fluid vacuum around and ahead still entering and dividing ;
 No balk retarding, no anchor anchoring, on no rock striking ;
 Swift, glad, content, unbereav’d, nothing losing ;
 Of all, able and ready at any time to give strict account,
 The divine ship sails the divine sea.”²

The “simple separate person” is now launched into the turmoil of life.

“The guest that was coming, he waited long, he is now housed ;
 He is one of those who are beautiful and happy, he is one of those
 that to look upon and be with is enough.”³

Now read the poem, *There Was a Child Went Forth*,⁴ to this poem Mr. Rossetti gave the significant title, *Assimilations* ; following up with Section 46 of the *Song of Myself*.

“The boy I love, the same becomes a man not through derived
 power, but in his own right ;
 Wicked rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear.”⁵

In the development of the individual Whitman regards life in the open air as an important element.

“Now I see the making of the best persons ;
 It is to live in the open air, and to eat and sleep with the earth.”

And—

“Now I re-examine philosophies and religions ;
 They may prove well in lecture-rooms, yet not prove at all under
 the spacious clouds, and along the landscape, and flowing
 currents.”⁷

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 121.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 282.

² *Ibid*, p. 178.

⁵ *Ibid*,

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 123.

³ *Ibid*, p. 336.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 123.

The *Song of the Open Road* and the *Song of Joys* are mainly devoted to the joys of open-air life; and the latter part of *Specimen Days* (after the war) was mostly written “under the spacious clouds, and along the landscape and flowing currents.”

Hoveling over the clear brook-water, I am sooth'd by its soft gurgle in one place, and the hoarser murmurs of its three-foot fall in another. Come, ye disconsolate ones, in whom any latent eligibility is left—come, get the sure virtues of creek-shore, and wood, and field. Two months have I absorb'd them, and they begin to make a new man of me. Every day seclusion—every day at least two or three hours of freedom, bathing, no talk, no dress, no books, no manners.¹

All the artificialities, the shams of life; all bowing in the temples of custom and conventionality; all our petty meannesses and craving after constant change and excitement; and most of men's sins, diseases, and follies, are the result of persistent indoor life—of crowding into the cities. Man will have advanced far in the direction of freedom when the country has ceased congregating into the towns, and when the cities have begun to scatter themselves into the country.

2.—“CHILDREN OF ADAM.”

“We discourse freely, without shame, of one form of sensuality, and are silent about another. We are so degraded that we cannot speak simply of the necessary functions of human nature. In earlier ages, in some countries, every function was reverently spoken of, and regulated by law.”—THOREAU, *Walden*.

WE have alluded to the *Songs of Sex*; and we have

¹ *Prose*, p. 96.

now to express ourselves as clearly as possible concerning the most difficult part of Whitman's writings; difficult, not merely of acceptance, but difficult even to understand.

In his poem, *Starting from Paumanok*, which, though not one of his earliest utterances, may be taken as setting forth the general plan of his life's work, Whitman wrote :—

And sexual organs and acts, do you concentrate in me ;
for I am determined to tell you with courageous, clear
voice ; to prove you illustrious.

Consistently with this announcement Whitman inserted, in many of his poems, lines and sentiments which—to the ordinary reader—are not only most shocking and offensive, but are liable to produce the impression that they were written by a man who lived a licentious life, and who allowed his fine intellect to wallow in impure and abominable ideas. Whereas in reality Whitman's life appears to have been remarkable for its manliness and cleanliness ; and his greatest aim was to give his fellow-men a helping hand in the direction of purity, and not to lower them towards sensuality and moral degradation. He was of opinion that any act which is not in itself wrong is *ipso facto* a fit and proper theme for serious conversation, for rational discussion, for literature. And, further, that if *life* be a “honourable estate,” so must the fact of *birth* be ; and if birth, why not the fact of *conception*? and granting that conception is honourable, and clean, and “illustrious,” why should consideration of the organs, passions, experiences, necessary to bring about conception, birth, personal existence, be relegated to a position of shame? To

this question Whitman's reply—plain, straightforward, emphatic—will be found in the series of poems named *Children of Adam* :—

“ Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean ;

Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest.”¹

Mr. Stedman wrote :—

Nature's own poet must adopt her own method ; and she hides the processes that are unpleasant to see or consider. Whitman often dwells upon the under side of things—the decay, the ferment, the germination, which nature conducts in secret ; though out of them she produces new life and beauty.²

For our own part, although it is now many years since we realised the essential greatness of Whitman's personality and writings, we for a long time found it exceedingly difficult to form a decided opinion—to arrive at any conclusion satisfactory to ourselves—respecting this much-debated phase of Whitman's work ; and it has been only in comparatively recent years that we have finally accepted these passages. A writer, quoted by Dr. Bucke, observed : “ It takes seven years to learn to appreciate Walt Whitman's poetry.”³ This was, to some extent, our own experience ; and we have noticed that, while our appreciation of the *Songs of Sex* was originally merely negative, if not somewhat unfriendly, the study and reflection of years so developed our attitude that we now regard this series of poems, not perhaps as the most beautiful, but certainly as the most important and

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 31.

² *The Nature and Elements of Poetry*.

³ *Matador*, in the *New York Graphic*.

original part of Whitman's work, and the part most deserving of careful study.

Whitman found—as all of us have found—sex degraded to a condition of obscenity and shame. Yet sex is the great central fact of life; and it is by means of the sexual attributes of men and women, and by their means only, that the human race survives, and will continue to exist. And Whitman endeavoured, by asserting the cleanliness of sex, by admitting the reproductive organs and their attributes as coequal in sacredness and nobleness with the other organs and their attributes, to prove sex “illustrious.”

Whitman's endeavour to cleanse sex of its obscene aspect may not have been successful; and if the popular position with regard to that part of the human organism is to be changed (as it must be), he possibly (as some of his critics have asserted) was not the most suitable man to undertake the office; but it cannot be denied that the endeavours which he made in this direction were conscientious; and it is something that somebody has made a beginning. Moreover, Whitman has drawn attention in a somewhat forcible manner to the necessity for a change of opinion in regard to this important subject; and there can be no doubt that opinion (how far due to Whitman's writings we are not prepared to say) *is*, gradually, however slowly, trying to abandon ribaldry and shame, and accommodating itself to the demand for rationalistic treatment.

There can be no doubt that the storm of adverse criticism (frequently even going so far as personal vituperation), to which the verses in question and their author have been subjected, has been largely instrumental in keeping those of Whitman's writings

to which no possible objection can be made, out of the hands of many people who could not have failed to benefit by their splendidly robust, transcendental, and democratic spirit. Although we cannot think that even the most infatuated lover of obscene literature could find any satisfaction for his appetite for filth in anything Whitman wrote, yet even Whitman's most devoted admirers cannot but admit that these passages are meat too strong for babes. And although *Leaves of Grass*, as finally presented to the world, would in its very nature be incomplete without these questionable passages, they are suitable only for those readers who can appreciate the spirit in which they were written.

In 1869 Mrs. Gilchrist wrote to Mr. Rossetti as follows :—

It seems to me that it would be wise in the future editions to divide the poems into two entirely distinct, not consecutive, volumes; the one very large.....the other very small; and to put a few words before this one that should, if possible, guide it into the right hands—the hands of those who can think greatly or love greatly, either or both. Thus a stumbling-block would be removed from those who might, to their own infinite joy, receive a great part, but not yet all, that Walt Whitman has given them.¹

Whether this suggestion has ever been acted upon in America or not we have had no means of ascertaining; but there are several selections from *Leaves of Grass* published both in England and in America² from which all the pieces to which this objection can be made have been studiously omitted. The reader who has learned, by perusing any of these selections, to appreciate the free spirit of Whitman's poetry may

¹ Anne Gilchrist : *Her Life and Writings*.

² See Appendix No. 2.

pursue the subject further by procuring a complete, unabridged edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

In 1881 Whitman wrote:—

Up and down this breadth by Beacon Street—Boston Common—I walk'd for two hours, of a bright, sharp February mid-day, twenty-one years ago, with Emerson, then in his prime, keen, physically and morally magnetic, arm'd at every point, and, whenever he chose, wielding the emotional just as well as the intellectual. During those two hours he was the talker and I the listener. It was an argument-statement, reconnoitering, review, attack, and pressing home.....of all that could be said against that part (and a main part) in the construction of my poems, *Children of Adam*. More precious than gold to me that dissertation—it afforded me, ever after, this strange and paradoxical lesson; each part of E.'s statement was unanswerable, no judge's charge ever more complete or convincing; I could never hear the points better put; and then I felt, down in my soul, the clear and unmistakeable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way. “What have you to say then to such things?” said E., pausing in conclusion. “Only that, while I can't answer them at all, I feel more settled than ever to adhere to my own theory, and exemplify it,” was my candid response. Whereupon we went and had a good dinner at the American house. And thenceforward I never waver'd or was touched with qualms (as I confess I had been two or three times before).¹

The following extract from the prose composition printed at the end of *Leaves of Grass*—*A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads*—further illustrates the poet's position with respect to this much-disputed question:—

From another point of view *Leaves of Grass* is avowedly the song of Sex and Amativeness, and even Animality, though meanings that do not usually go along with those

¹ *Prose*, p. 184.

words are behind all, and will duly emerge; and all are sought to be lifted into a different light and atmosphere. Of this theme, intentionally palpable in a few lines, I shall only say the espousing principle of those lines so gives breadth of life to my whole scheme that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted. Difficult as it will be, it has become, in my opinion, imperative to achieve a shifted attitude from superior men and women towards the thought and fact of sexuality, as an element in character, personality, and emotions, and a theme in literature. I am not going to argue the question by itself. The vitality of it is altogether in its relations, bearings, significance, like the clef of a symphony. At last analogy the lines I allude to, and the spirit in which they are spoken, permeate all *Leares of Grass*, and the work must stand or fall with them, as the human body and soul must remain an entirety.¹

When.....she had read the beautiful, "despised" poems, *Children of Adam*, by the "light that glows out of the rest of the volume, by the light of a clear, strong faith in God, of an unfathomably deep and tender love for humanity, light shed out of a soul that is possess'd of itself," Mrs. Gilchrist wrote Rossetti that he argued rightly that her confidence would not be betrayed by any of the poems in the book. None of them, she said, troubled her even for a moment, because she saw at a glance that it was not, as men supposed, the heights brought down to the depths, but the depths lifted up level with the sunlit heights, that they might become clear and sunlit too.²

Finally, referring to this series of poems, Whitman wrote :—

I take occasion now to confirm those lines with the settled convictions and deliberate renewals of thirty years, and to hereby prohibit, so far as word of mine can do so, any elision of them.³

¹ *A Backward Glance*, etc., p. 444.

² *Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman*.

³ *A Backward Glance*, etc., p. 445.

3.—"DEMOCRATIC VISTAS"

"In the meantime *Leaves of Grass* is the *Bible of Democracy*, containing the highest exemplar of life yet furnished, and suited to the present age and to America. Within it is folded (as the oak in the acorn, or the man in the new-born babe) a new spiritual life for myriads of men and women."—*Walt Whitman*, by Dr. R. M. BUCKE.

MR. HAVELOCK ELLIS wrote: "It is as the prophet-poet of Democracy that Whitman should be approached."¹ We will now endeavour to examine Whitman's writings—both prose and poetry—with a view of ascertaining the meaning given by him to the word "democracy."

We have frequently printed the word "democracy." Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawaken'd, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten because that history has yet to be enacted.....As I perceive, the tendencies of our day.....are toward those vast and sweeping movements, influences, moral and physical, of humanity, now and always current over the planet, on the scale of the impulses of the elements. Then it is also good to reduce the whole matter to the consideration of a single self, a man, a woman, on permanent grounds. Even for the treatment of the universal, in politics, metaphysics, or anything, sooner or later we come down to one single, solitary soul.

There is, in sanest hours, a consciousness, a thought that rises, independent, lifted out from all else, calm, like the stars, shining eternal. This is the thought of identity—yours for you, whoever you are, as mine for me. Miracle of miracles, beyond all statement, most spiritual and

¹ *The Psychology of Sex.*

vaguest of earth's dreams, yet hardest basic fact, and only entrance to all facts. In such devout hours, in the midst of the significant wonders of heaven and earth (significant only because of the Me in the centre), creeds, conventions, fall away and become of no account before this simple idea. Under the luminousness of real vision, it alone takes possession, takes value.¹

In *Democratic Vistas* Whitman gives a grim illustration of the corrupt condition of modern society :—

I say we had best look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease. Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness of heart than at present, and here in the United States genuine belief seems to have left us. The underlying principles of the States are not honestly believ'd in.....nor is humanity itself believ'd in. What penetrating eye does not everywhere see through the mask ? The spectacle is appalling. We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout. The men believe not in the women, nor the women in the men. A scornful superciliousness rules in literature. The aim of all the *littérateurs* is to find something to make fun of. A lot of churches, sects, etc., the most dismal phantasms I know, usurp the name of religion. Conversation is a mass of badinage. From deceit in the spirit, the mother of all false deeds, the offspring is already incalculable.....The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism. In fashionable life flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, small aims, or no aims at all, only to kill time. In business (this all-devouring modern word—business) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain. The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents ; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field. The best class we show is but a mob of fashionably-dress'd speculators and vulgarians.²

Such pictures are, unfortunately, common enough ; and are to be found, without much seeking, in other

¹ *Prose*, pp. 222, 223.

² *Ibid*, p. 204.

countries besides the United States of North America ; *patriotism*, too, and *religion*, both of which are by rights spontaneous, and without price, appear, more and more, as time goes on, to be grasping after payment for their services.

Whitman's clearest definition of a democratic citizen, of a “simple separate person,” is given in his *Song of the Open Road* :—

“From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines ;
Going where I list my own master total and absolute ;
Listening to others, considering well what they say ;
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating ;
Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds
that would hold me.”¹

Democracy includes, and is,

LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY—

words the real significance of which has been revealed to but few of the children of men since the dawn of history.

“Great is Liberty ! Great is Equality ! I am their follower :
Helmsmen of nations, choose your craft ; where you sail, I sail ;
I weather it out with you, or sink with you.”²

Again :—

“Without extinction is Liberty ; without retrograde is Equality ;
They live in the feelings of young men, and the best women ;
Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the earth been always
ready to fall for Liberty.”³

More precious than all worldly riches is Freedom : freedom from the painful constipation and poor narrowness of ecclesiasticism ; freedom in manners, habiliments, furniture ; from the silliness and tyranny of local fashions ; entire freedom from party rings, and mere conventions in

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 122.

² *Great are the Myths* ; in *Gathered Leaves*.

³ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 270.

politics; and, better than all, a general freedom of One's Self from the tyrannical domination of vices, habits, appetites, under which nearly every man of us.....is enslaved.Great, unspeakably great, is the Will, the free soul of man.....For there is to the highest, that law as absolute as any—more absolute than any—the Law of Liberty. The shallow.....consider Liberty a release from all law, from every constraint. The wise see in it, on the contrary, the potent law of laws—namely, the fusion and combination of the conscious will, or partial individual law, with those universal, eternal, unconscious ones, which run through all time, pervade history, prove immortality, give moral purpose to the entire objective, and the last dignity to human life.¹

It is impossible to state too often—for it is frequently forgotten—that liberty means freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and freedom of action ; that these *are* liberty, and that the denial of one, with whatever reservations such denial may be made, implies equal denial of the others.

“The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers ;
The continuance of Equality shall be Comrades.”²

What is that equality, “the continuance” of which “shall be comrades”—the equality of every man and woman with every other man and woman. There are many people who consider this assertion an arrogant assumption, perhaps even an absurdity ; but this is the *basic principle of democracy*. We cannot stop short of this ; we cannot pause to consider the necessity for caste distinctions between rich and poor, learned and ignorant, vulgar and refined, wicked and virtuous, teacher and pupils ; the world does not need, and never can need, oppression and tyranny ; arrogance is always offensive ; no overlaying of veneer

¹ *Prose*, p. 331.

² *Leaves of Grass*, p. 247.

or varnish can make it appear graceful, or turn it into a virtue; there is no human being, however poor or foolish, however ignorant or degraded, from whom the rest of mankind has not much to learn, and to whom the rest of mankind is not—or may not be—deeply indebted. When we come to consider the character of an individual—even of one with whom we are intimately acquainted—to dispassionately reflect upon his proclivities for good on the one hand, and, on the other, his possibilities of evil, it is surprising how nearly they balance. A slight inclination of the scale towards the one side, and there is the individual with all the qualities that go to make the good citizen; a suspicion on the other side, and we have the man or woman who has yielded to temptation, and—“when a man’s down, down with him.” The lesson of *What Shall We Do?* must bring us to a pause in our propensities for judging and undervaluing our fellow men and women.

Of Equality—as if it harm’d me, giving others the same chances and rights as myself—as if it were not indispensable to my own rights that others possess the same.¹

Whitman’s assertions of Equality do not, of course, point to uniformity. Equality is one of Democracy’s basic principles, and is inseparable from perfect and absolute Freedom. Uniformity, on the other hand, is not merely own brother of tyranny, but can only be secured or enforced by the sacrifice of Liberty, and by ultimate resort to physical force. Mankind is not to be regarded collectively as a mere machine; but each man and each woman is individually, separately, “A Revelation in the Flesh.”

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 218.

Whitman was fully aware of the tendency of man to ignore the commandment, " Judge not, lest ye be judged": there is an expression which he uses very frequently—*Whoever you are*; his writings are addressed to you, personally, individually, "whoever you are"—that is, to every man and every woman. In the *Leaf Salut au Monde* we find this assertion of Equality :—

" All you continentals of Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, indifferent
of place,
All you on the numberless islands of the Archipelagoes of the sea,
And you of centuries hence when you listen to me;
And you, each and everywhere, whom I specify not, but include just
the same.
Health to you ! good will to you all ! from me and America sent!
Each of us inevitable ;
Each of us limitless; each of us with his or her right upon the earth ;
Each of us here as divinely as any is here."¹

The *Song of Occupations* is addressed entirely to working men and women :—

" Is it you thought the President greater than you ?
Or the rich better off than you ? or the educated wiser than
you ? "²

And the *Song of the Broad Axe* is little more than a rhapsody on the work originating with the implement which stands at the source of all industry—the Axe—"the mighty and friendly emblem of the power of my own race—the newest, largest race."³

It is to the workers, not to the idlers and parasites, that Whitman looks for realisation of his democratic ideal :—

" I raise a voice.....
To teach the average man the glory of his daily walk and trade ;

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 119.

² *Ibid*, p. 170.

³ *Ibid*, p. 155.

To sing in songs how exercise and chemical life are never to be baffled ;
 To manual work for each and all, to plough, hoe, dig,
 To plant and tend the tree, the berry, vegetables, flowers,
 For every man to see to it that he really do something for **every**
 woman too ;
 To use the hammer and the saw ;
 To cultivate a turn for carpentering, plastering, painting ;
 To work as tailor, tailoress, nurse, hostler, porter ;
 To invent a little, something ingenious, to aid the washing,
 cooking, cleaning ;
 And hold it no disgrace to take a hand at them themselves.”¹

But on the general body of the people, so long as they lean, and live, and depend upon the thoughts and opinions of others, he places no reliance ; he looks to the future development of the individuality of each unit to produce a community of “simple separate persons”; and he never ceases reminding us that every man and every woman possesses a wonderful, a glorious personality, which is only dormant and awaiting development. He makes much of the old saying, *Know Thyself*, but would have us go a step further — Be Thyself ; which sentiment we find expressed with peculiar emphasis in the beautiful poem, *To You (Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walk of Dreams)*.²

The object of all work should be, firstly, utility to our fellow men ; and secondly, though perhaps equally, the development of the worker’s character : not, as appears to be commonly supposed, merely the satisfying of the greed for money-getting :—

Beyond the independence of a little sum laid aside for burial-money, and of a few clap-boards around and shingles overhead on a lot of American soil own’d, and the easy

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, 162.

² *Ibid*, p. 186.

dollars that supply the year's plain clothing and meals; the melancholy prudence of the abandonment of such a great being as man is to the toss and pallor of years of money-making, with all their scorching days and icy nights, and all their stifling deceits and underhand dodgings, or infinitesimals of parlours, or shameless stuffing while others starve; and all the loss of the bloom and odour of the earth, and of the flowers and atmosphere, and of the sea, and of the true taste of the women and men you pass and have to do with in youth and middle age; and the issuing sickness and desperate revolt at the close of a life without elevation or naivete (even if you have achieved a secure 10,000 a year, or election to Congress, or the Governorship), and the ghastly chatter of a death without serenity or majesty, is the great fraud upon modern civilisation and forethought, blotching the surface which civilisation undeniably drafts, and moistening with tears the immense features it spreads and spreads with such velocity before the reached kisses of the soul.¹

Whitman was unmistakably a Revolter. The title *Revolters* would have been highly appropriate for the verse he inscribed to *Beginners*² :—

“ How they are provided for upon the earth (appearing at intervals);
 How dear and dreadful they are to the earth;
 How they inure to themselves as much as to any—what a paradox
 appears their age;
 How people respond to them, yet know them not;
 How there is something relentless in their fate, all times;
 How all times mischoose the objects of their adulation and
 reward;
 How the same inexorable price must be paid for the same great
 purchase.”

In *Leaves of Grass* there are many passages celebrating Revolt. The poem, *To A Foil'd Revolter or Revoltress*, is one of Whitman's most powerful writings:—

“ I am the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel the world over;

¹ Prose, p. 265.

² *Leaves of Grass*, p. 15.

And he going with me leaves peace and routine behind him,
And stakes his life to be lost at any moment.”¹

In one of the *Inscriptions—To the States*—he wrote :

“ Resist much ! Obey little ! ”²

Elsewhere he exclaims :—

“ O latent right of insurrection !
O quenchless indispensable fire ! ”³

And :—

“ Then courage, Revolter, Revoltress,
For till all ceases neither must you cease ! ”⁴

Whitman lived in stirring times, when revolt against the old order of things was abroad on every hand. At the time of his birth, and during the early years of his childhood, Simon Bolivar was leading the revolt of the Spanish American Colonies against the supremacy of Spain : Whitman was familiar with the circumstances of the mad Revolt against slavery of John Brown ; with the supremacy, in the United States, of the slave-holding oligarchy, and the Revolt of the Northern States against the attempt of “ the South ” to destroy the Union. And we may readily understand with what eagerness he must have watched and studied the careers of such Revolters as Mazzini, Kossuth, and Garibaldi ; while he himself is in many respects in close affinity with that greatest of modern Revolters—Leo Tolstoy.

In the foregoing remarks and quotations on the subject of Revolt, we have no intention of claiming Whitman as an upholder of perpetual rebellion against things as they are for the mere sake of change. To advocate change for the mere grasping after variety is only folly ; but to “ nourish active

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 287. ² *Ibid*, p. 15. ³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 288.

rebellion ” against all shams, and against such customs, laws, and conventionalities as are permitted to form a barrier between man and nature, and between each individual and complete religious and civil freedom, is not only justifiable, but incumbent upon all “ simple separate persons,” at all times, and under whatever circumstances. The development of personality can only go hand in hand with renunciation of custom, which, as Professor Teufelsdröch reminded us long ago, “ doth make dotards of us all.”

At the same time we cannot but admit that throughout Whitman’s writings there does run a strong under-current of restlessness : he is always “ afoot and light-hearted,” on the “ Open Road.”

Mr. Havelock Ellis wrote :—

When we read certain portions of *Leaves of Grass*, we seem to see a vast phalanx of Great Companions passing for ever along the cosmic roads ; pioneers of the Universe. There are superb young men, athletic girls, splendid and savage old men—for the weak seem to have perished by the road-side—and they radiate an infinite energy, an infinite joy.¹

While foreseeing in the future the perfect freedom, athletic vigour, and strenuousness of a liberated race, Whitman does not lose sight of the world’s outcasts and failures, who, owing to our lack of proper social organisation, have not been afforded opportunities of fulfilling their proper—natural—vocations in life.

“ I make the poem of evil also, I celebrate that part also ;
I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—and I
say there is in fact no evil ;
Or if there is, I say it is just as important to you, to the land, or to
me, as anything else.”²

¹ *The New Spirit.*

² *Leaves of Grass*, p. 22.

But although he “commemorates” evil, he does not class it as positive, nor as goodness undeveloped; more as a veil or mist of weakness and ignorance suspended between men and the “eternal verities”; this will gradually disappear as men acquire wisdom. He is forced to recognise the inherent divineness of each human unit, “whoever you are.”

“In this broad earth of ours,
 Amid the measureless grossness and the slag,
 Enclosed and safe within its central heart,
 Nestles the seed perfection.
 By every life a share more or less,
 None born but it is born ; conceal’d or unconceal’d, the
 seed is waiting.”¹

In the poem *To You* :—

“Painters have painted their swarming groups, and the centre-figure of all ;
 From the head of the centre-figure spreading a nimbus of gold-color’d light ;
 But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-color’d light ;
 From my hand, from the brain of every man and woman it streams, effulgently flowing for ever.”²

From *every* man and woman ; not from the virtuous only, or the honest, or the respectable, or the well-dressed, but from the failure and the outcast as well ; “from the brain of every man and woman.”

“Roaming in thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is Good hastening towards immortality ; And the vast all that is call’d Evil I saw hastening to merge itself, and become lost and dead.”³

Freedom and equality cannot be secured to us by statute ; but they may become part of the human life by means of a force of unlimited strength—Love—the love of Comrades ; a force which is insisted upon,

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 81.

² *Ibid*, p. 187.

³ *Ibid*, 216.

and dwelt upon at great length, throughout *Leaves of Grass*. The series of poems named *Calamus* is entirely devoted to the subject of “manly love,” which Whitman regards as the only force which can permanently bind mankind together into one homogeneous whole.

“Affection shall solve the problems of freedom yet ;
Those who love each other shall become invincible.

No danger shall balk Columbia’s lovers ;
If need be, a thousand shall sternly immolate themselves for one.

It shall be customary in the houses and streets to see manly affection ;
The most dauntless and rude shall touch face to face lightly ;
The dependence of liberty shall be lovers ;
The continuance of Equality shall be comrades.
These shall tie and bind you stronger than hoops of iron ;
I, ecstatic, O partners ! O lands ! with the love of lovers tie you !
Were you looking to be held together by lawyers ?
Or by an agreement on paper ? Or by arms ?
Nay, nor the world, nor any living thing, will so cohere.”¹

And he

“ Will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon ;
By the love of Comrades,
By the manly love of Comrades.”²

The *Calamus* series of poems, coupled with the fact that he never married, has been interpreted into a suspicion against Whitman of “sexual inversion”; he “celebrates a friendship in which physical contact, with a kind of silent voluptuous emotion, are essential elements”;³ but we take leave to doubt if material proof of any value has been produced for such a suspicion. Whitman told Dr. Bucke, “I suppose the

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 247. ² *Ibid*, p. 99.

³ *The Psychology of Sex*, by Havelock Ellis.

chief reason why I never married must have been an overmastering passion for entire freedom, unconstraint; I had an instinct against forming ties that would bind me.”¹ It is true that the *Calamus* poems were written before the war of 1861–65, so that Whitman’s experiences, in the military hospitals and camps, of those who risked or laid down their lives for the “old cause”—the experiences which proved that his *Leaves of Grass* were realities, and not mere arrogant and sentimental verbiage—had no part in their composition. But, so far as we have been able to ascertain, from very careful study both of Whitman’s own writings and a considerable number of accounts of his personality—his manners, conversation, thoughts, daily life—written by people who knew and loved him, the “Love of Comrades” is the poet’s ideal condition of society, to be realised in the future.

In fond fancy leaping those hundreds of years ahead, let us survey America’s works, poems, philosophies; fulfilling prophecies, and giving form and decision to best ideals..... Intense and loving comradeship, the personal and passionate attachment of man to man, which, hard to define, underlies the lessons and ideals of the profound saviours of every land and age, and which seems to promise, when thoroughly develop’d, cultivated, and recognised in manners and literature, the most substantial hope and safety of these States, will then be fully express’d.²

To the above passage Whitman added this footnote:—

It is to the development, identification, and general prevalence of that fervid comradeship (the adhesive love, at least rivalling the amative love hitherto possessing imaginative literature, if not going beyond it) that I look for the counterbalance and offset of our materialistic and vulgar

¹ *Walt Whitman*, by Dr. R. M. Bucke. ² *Prose*, pp, 239, 240.

American democracy, and for the spiritualisation thereof. Many will say it is a dream, and will not follow my inferences; but I confidently expect a time when there will be seen, running like a half-hid warp through all the myriad audible and visible worldly interests of America, threads of manly friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long, carried to degrees hitherto unknown—not only in giving tone to individual character, and making it unprecedently emotional, muscular, heroic, and refined, but having the deepest relations to general polities. I say democracy infers such loving comradeship as its most inevitable twin or counterpart; without which it would be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself.¹

So much for Whitman's hopes of, and faith in, democracy. To sum up the matter as briefly as possible, Whitman believed in encouraging discontent with, even to revolt against, all things which are repulsive to the soul of man, particularly the tyranny of custom. For the making of a community of “simple, separate persons,” he asks for no finer material than such as existed around him in his own time; he does not call upon humanity to change its nature; he does not pray for a new heaven and a new earth; all he asks of man is that he realise his own inherent nobleness, that he shake the “hopples” from his ankles, and inure himself to “pluck, reality, self-esteem, definiteness, elevatedness”; so each “simple, separate, person” shall be governed by but one law, and that the law of his or her own conscience—a sentiment emphasised by Ibsen's Dr. Stockmann: “the strongest man upon earth is he who stands most alone.”

The purpose of democracy—supplanting old belief in the necessary absoluteness of establish'd dynastic rulership, temporal, ecclesiastical, and scholastic, as furnishing the

¹ *Prose*, p. 240.

only security against chaos, crime, and ignorance—is, through many transmigrations, and amid endless ridicule, arguments, and ostensible failures, to illustrate, at all hazards, the doctrine and theory that man, properly train'd in sanest, highest freedom, may and must become a law, and series of laws, unto himself; surrounding and providing for, not only his own personal control, but all his relations to other individuals, and to the State; and that, while other theories, as in the past histories of nations, have proved wise enough, and indispensable perhaps for their conditions, *this*, as matters now stand in our civilised world, is the only scheme worth working from, as warranting results like those of Nature's laws, reliable, when once established, to carry on themselves.¹

In obedience to the law of conscience, each individual—a world, a cosmos, ruled over by himself—will revolve in his or her own orbit; accepting the attractions and influences of the innumerable universes revolving around him, not subordinately, but only as nourishment for his or her own individuality.

"From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines;
 Going where I list, my own master total and absolute;
 Listening to others, considering well what they say;
 Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating;
 Gently, but with undenial will, divesting myself of the holds that
 would hold me."²

It is true that at the present time we appear to be a long distance away from the attainment of Whitman's ideal; indeed, the present-day legislation of most civilised communities, and the general trend of public opinion, are rather in the direction of curtailing than of increasing individual freedom. But we must not overlook the fact that our neighbour's suspicions, that our desires for complete freedom are based upon

¹ *Prose*, p. 208.

² *Leaves of Grass*, p. 122.

corrupt and self-seeking motives, arise from his failure to recognise and understand the great fact of human equality. But such presumptions are merely transient, being part of that evil which Whitman sees "hastening to merge itself, and become lost and dead"; while the law of Liberty is eternal.

"What we believe in waits latent for ever through all the continents,
and all the islands and archipelagoes of the sea;
What we believe in invites no one, promises nothing, sits in calm-
ness and light, is positive and composed, knows no discourage-
ment;
Waiting patiently, waiting its time."¹

4.—RELIGION.

In Starting from Paumanok Whitman announced :—

"I, too, following many, and followed by many, inaugurate a religion."

Whitman's religion is the love of man; not the love of humanity in the abstract (generally so abstract as to mean nothing but mere talk), but an emotional and personal affection for each individual of the race.

He must needs embrace each—all—without distinction of caste, creed, colour, or (best of all) character.

"He judges not as the judge judges, but as the sun falling round a helpless thing."

Whitman's lines, *To a Common Prostitute*, are almost

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 287.

² *Ibid*, p. 269.

too well known to justify repetition here, yet they cannot be quoted too often :—

“ Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you ;

Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you, and the leaves to rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you.”¹

Yet, from some points of view, it may be maintained that Whitman not only had no religion whatever, but that his words frequently savour of blasphemy. His sentiments concerning Deity are indefinite. In the *Song of Myself* he is apparently Pantheist ; in *The Square Deific* the Deity is God, Saviour, Santa Spirita, and Satan (Satan being the father of Revolt) ; elsewhere he appears rather inclined towards Polytheism ; and, again :

“ I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself.”²

But, since he enjoins us to “ be not curious about God,” we must conclude that he regards as mere waste of breath any attempt to define the unknowable.

“ And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God ;

For I, who am curious about each, am not curious about God :

(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about Death.)

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least ;

Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself. Why should I wish to see God better than this day ?

I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then ;

In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass ;

I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is signed by God’s name ;

And I leave them where they are, for I know that whereso’er I go Others will punctually come for ever and ever.”³

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 299.

² *Ibid*, p. 186.

³ *Ibid*, p. 76.

And, from *Passage to India* :—

“ O Thou transcendent,
 Nameless, the fibre and the breath ;
 Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them ;
 Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving ;
 Thou moral, spiritual fountain—affection’s source—thou reservoir ;

 Thou pulse—thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,
 That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,
 Athwart the shapeless vastnesses of space.”¹

Whitman was reared in the Society of Friends, in that branch which broke away from the main body under the leadership of Elias Hicks.² His training was, therefore, a rather mystical Unitarianism ; but his conception of Deity never crystallised into any confession of faith. Miss Helen E. Price, who was well acquainted with Whitman from 1856 to 1873, wrote :—

If I were asked what I considered Walt Whitman’s leading characteristic, I should say.....his *religious sentiment* or feeling. It pervades and dominates his life, and I think no one could be in his presence any length of time without being impressed by it. He is a born *walté*. His is not that religion, or show of it, that is comprised in dogmas, churches, creeds, etc. These are of little or no consequence to him ; but it is that habitual state of feeling in which the person regards everything in God’s universe with wonder, reverence, perfect acceptance, and love. He has more of this than any one I have ever met.³

And we quote the following passage from *Democratic Vistas* :—

The ripeness of religion is doubtless to be looked for in this field of individuality, and is a result that no organisation or church can ever achieve. As history is poorly

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 321.

² Whitman’s Notes Founded on Elias Hicks (Prose, p. 457) are worthy of careful study.

³ *Walt Whitman*, by Dr. R. M. Bucke.

retained by what the technists call history, and is not given out from their pages, except the learner has in himself the sense of the well-wrapt, never yet written, perhaps impossible to be written, history—so Religion, although casually arrested, and, after a fashion, preserved in the churches and creeds, does not depend at all upon them, but is a part of the identified soul, which can really confront Religion when it extricates itself entirely from the churches, and not before. Personalism fuses this, and favours it. I should say, indeed, that only in the perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality may the spirituality of religion positively come forth at all. Only here, and on such terms, the meditation, the devout ecstasy, the soaring flight. Only here, communion with the mysteries, the eternal problems, whence? whither? Alone, and identity, and the mood—and the soul emerges, and all statements, churches, sermons, melt away like vapours. Alone, and silent thought and awe, and aspiration—and then the interior consciousness, like a hitherto unseen inscription, in magic ink, beams out its wondrous lines to the sense. Bibles may convey, and priests expound; but it is exclusively for the noiseless operation of one's isolated Self, to enter the pure ether of veneration, reach the divine levels, and commune with the unutterable.¹

Mr. Whitman impressed me, by his conversation on life, immortality, and such topics, as one who, in common with others who had investigated and reflected on the subject, was reluctant to even attempt to formulate a description of Deity, or to describe in detail its or his attributes.....The truth was that he considered life too short to quibble over immaterial questions of creed.....He was in faith, if anything, a Unitarian.²

But somewhere Whitman himself characterises Unitarianism as a “soul-less religion.” Unitarianism, as we have known it, is cautious, cool-headed, rational; quite different from the spontaneity which is so conspicuous a characteristic of Whitman's personality.

¹ *Prose*, p. 226. ² *Walt Whitman the Man*, by Thomas Donaldson.

Peter Doyle told Dr. Bucke :—

He had pretty vigorous ideas on religion, but he never said anything slighting the church. I don't know if he felt different from what he spoke. He never went to church—didn't like form, ceremonies—didn't seem to favour preachers at all.....I have heard him say that if a person was a right kind of person—and I guess he thought all persons right kind of persons—he couldn't be destroyed in the next world or this.¹

One day, talking about religious experiences, Whitman said :—

I never had any particular religious experiences—never felt that I needed to be saved—never felt the need of spiritual regeneration—never had any fear of hell, or distrust of the scheme of the universe. I always felt that it was perfectly right, and for the best.²

Mr. Traubel wrote :—

Whitman did not negative the churches. He included them. He never ceased his refusal of all special claims made for one faith. "I am as much Mohammedan as Buddhist, as much nothing as something. I have a good deal of use for the religions. But if I am to be dragooned into some small desert place which in the churches is called a creed, and left there to die, I must act on my always reserved right of decision. The time will come when even Christians will acknowledge that Ingersoll, reforming the average Christianity of our day, was a direct witness of God. Nevertheless, while I expect to see the whole nature of Christian theory changed, much old trumpery and barbarity dismissed, I do not feel called upon to use an axe myself."³

¹ *Calamus; Letters to Peter Doyle.*

² *Walt Whitman*, by Dr. R. M. Bucke.

³ Horace L. Traubel, in the *Arena*, January, 1896.

5.—PRUDENCE, CHARITY, AND PERSONAL FORCE.

“I am the poet of the Body, and I am the poet of the Soul :
 The pleasures of heaven are with me, and the pains of hell are
 with me ;
 The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate
 into a new tongue.”¹

WE have already endeavoured to draw attention to Whitman’s conscientious endeavours to cleanse sex of its obscene aspect; this was one of “the pains of hell” which he translated in a “new tongue.” The principles of Democracy, also, he translated into a “tongue” quite different from tyranny by show of hands, or (as Carlyle facetiously terms it) “tremendous cheers.” Another of these “pains of hell” is Prudence. Whitman found Charity degenerated into what is usually termed “Prudence”: the boundless Charity of those whom he felicitously terms “the profound saviours of every land and age,” debased, in these latter days, into mere calculation. He, therefore, endeavoured to “translate” Prudence into “a new tongue.”

He defined Prudence as—

“All the brave actions of war and peace ;
 All help given to relatives, strangers, the poor, old, sorrowful, young
 children, widows, the sick, and to shunn’d persons ;
 All self-denial that stood steady and aloof on wrecks, and saw others
 fill the seats of the boats ;
 All offering of substance or life for the good old cause, or for a
 friend’s sake, or for opinion’s sake ;
 All pains of enthusiasts mocked at by their neighbours ;
 All the limitless sweet love and precious suffering of mothers ;
 All honest men baffled in strifes, recorded or unrecorded.”²

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 45.

² *Ibid.* p. 290.

And Prudence—

“Knows that the young man who composedly perill'd his life and lost it has done exceedingly well for himself without doubt; That he who has never perill'd his life, but retains it to old age in riches and ease, has probably achiev'd nothing for himself worth mentioning.”¹

Also—

“Charity and personal force are the only investments worth anything.”²

Whitman defined *Charity and Personal Force* in the Preface to the original issue of *Leaves of Grass* :—

This is what you shall do: Love the earth, and sun, and the animals; despise riches; give alms to every one that asks; stand up for the stupid and crazy; devote your income and labour to others; hate tyrants; argue not concerning God; have patience and indulgence towards the people; take off your hat to nothing known or unknown, or to any man or number of men; go freely with powerful uneducated persons, and with the young, and with the mothers of families;re-examine all you have been told at school, or church, or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem; and have the richest fluency, not only in its words, but in the silent lines of its lips and face, and between the lashes of your eyes, and in every motion and joint of your body.³

This is *Charity and Personal Force*: it is only Charity—“which suffereth long, and is kind”—that can develop the Personal Force of the “fluid and attaching character.”

“The fluid and attaching character is the freshness and sweetness of man and woman;

(The herbs of the morning sprout no fresher and sweeter every day out of the roots themselves than it sprouts fresh and sweet continually out of itself.)

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 291.

² *Ibid*, p. 290.

³ *Prose*, p. 259.

Toward the fluid and attaching character exudes the sweat of the love of young and old ;
 From it falls distill'd the charm that mocks beauty and attainments ;
 Toward it heaves the shuddering, longing ache of contact.”¹

“ Give alms to everyone that asks,” Peter Doyle said.

Dollars and cents have no weight with Walt at all. He didn't spend recklessly, but he spent everything—mostly on other people.....He always had a few pennies for beggars along the streets. I'd get out of patience sometimes, he was so lenient. “ Don't you think it wrong ? ” I'd ask him. “ No.” he always said, “ it's never wrong, Peter.” “ Wouldn't they drink it away ? ” He shook his head : “ No, and if they did, it wouldn't alter the matter. For it is better to give to a dozen who do not need what is given than to give to none at all, and so miss the one that should be fed.”²

6.—DEATH AND IMMORTALITY.

“ My embryo has never been torpid ” : he saw it down in the “ huge first Nothing ” ; through the ages he has watched it developing ; and he knows that development cannot be stopped by the grave. “ I tramp a *perpetual* journey.” The problem of Death thus confronts him with neither terrors nor anxieties, only —joyful anticipations of fresh experiences.

“ And I will show that nothing can happen more beautiful than death.”³

In the *Death Carol*, in *When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd*,⁴ Whitman addresses Death as “ lovely

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 125.

² *Calamus ; Letters to Peter Doyle*.

³ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 255.

and soothing," "strong deliveress," "vast and well-veil'd death." In *The Singer in the Prison*¹ death is referred to as "the heavenly pardoner."

In Whitman's view, Death is neither to be feared nor to be merely accepted philosophically, but to be welcomed as the gateway to a fuller life—fuller even than the material life which he glorifies throughout his writings as one continual experience of joys.

"O Death (for life has served its turn),
 Opener and usher to the heavenly mansion,
 Be thou my God."²

On the subject of Death and Immortality Whitman wrote a very fine poem, *To Think of Time*,³ which, beginning with a death-bed scene and a description of "the funeral of an old Broadway stage-driver," leads through death and into immortality.

"To think the thought of death merged in the thought of materials ;
 To think of all these wonders of city and country, and others taking
 interest in them, and we taking no interest in them ;
To think how eager we are, building our houses ;
To think that others shall be just as eager, and we quite indif-
 ferent."⁴

And—

"I have dreamed that the purpose and essence of the known life,
 the transient,
Is to form and decide identity for the unknown life, the permanent."

In his inspirations concerning the persistence of the ego Whitman's position is occasionally rather confusing; for, although he generally regards body and soul as separable entities, we have at times been puzzled by passages not altogether consistent with this theory; but, taking *Leaves of Grass* as a whole,

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 292.

² *Ibid*, p. 213.

³ *Ibid*, p. 333.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 333.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 337.

Whitman's expectation of conscious existence after physical death cannot be doubted.

“I believe in you, my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you ;
And you must not be abased to the other.”¹

Again—

“ Was somebody asking to see the Soul ?
See, your own shape and countenance, persons, substances, beasts,
the trees, the running rivers, the rocks and sands ;
All hold spiritual joys, and afterwards loosen them ;
How can the real body ever die, and be buried ?
Of your real body, and any man's or woman's real body,
Item for item it will elude the hands of the corpse-cleaners and pass
to fitting spheres ;
Carrying what has accrued from the moment of birth to the moment
of death.”²

The series of poems, *Whispers of Heavenly Death*, all breathe the certainty of personal immortality; also the poem, *Passage to India*. In the *Song of the Rolling Earth* Whitman wrote :—

“The soul is also real ; it, too, is positive and direct :
No reasoning, no proof, has established it ;
Undeniable growth has established it.”³

In *Leaves of Grass* there are many indications that Whitman was aware of the doctrine of Re-incarnation; but he does not appear to have deliberately adopted it into his theory of the universe. Nor does he appear to have been led away into the absurdities and extravagancies of amateur spiritualistic “investigation.”

In *A Dialogue in Hades* Whitman informs Omar Khayyam that his belief in personal immortality “was based chiefly on the theory of evolution”;⁴ but our own view of the matter is that Whitman's

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 32.

² *Ibid*, p. 25.

³ *Ibid*, p. 180.

⁴ *The Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1902.

belief in immortality was intuitive, not scientific; hence his carelessness as to details. All that we can assert with confidence is that Whitman was strongly convinced of the reality of a conscious life beyond the grave. He told Mr. Traubel :—

There are *arguments* against immortality; but there is no *vision* of denial. Did it never occur to some people how little way argument would carry them? how short the term of life of a thing proved by what is called logic.¹

In 1881, referring to the death of Thomas Carlyle, Whitman wrote :—

In ways perhaps eluding all the statements, lore, and speculations of ten thousand years—eluding all possible statements to mortal sense—does he yet exist, a definite, vital being; a spirit, an individual—perhaps now wafted in space among those stellar systems, which, suggestive and limitless as they are, merely edge more limitless, far more suggestive systems? I have no doubt of it. In silence of a fine night, such questions are answer'd to the soul; the best answers that can be given.²

At a complimentary dinner given to Whitman by his friends on the 31st of May, 1890, in Philadelphia (his seventy-first birthday), the poet said :—

To me the final and ultimate purpose of everything is completed, as it were, only by the unknown futurity of immortality.³

And yet Whitman also had his moments of doubt :—

“ Yet, yet, ye downcast hours, I know ye also;
Weights of lead, how ye clog and cling at my ankles;
Earth to a chamber of mourning turns—I hear the o'erweening,
mocking voice,
Matter is conqueror—matter, triumphant only, continues onward.”⁴

¹ H. L. Traubel, in the *Arena*, January, 1896. ² *Prose*, p. 163.

³ *In Re Walt Whitman*, p. 350. ⁴ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 341.

And elsewhere :—

“ Of the terrible doubt of appearances ;
 Of the uncertainty, after all, that we may be deluded ;
 That may be reliance and hope are but speculations after all ;
 That may be identity beyond the grave is a beautiful fable only.

To me these and the like of these are curiously answer'd by my
 lovers, my dear friends ;
 When he whom I love travels with me, or sits a long while holding
 me by the hand ;
 When the subtle air, the impalpable, the sense that words and
 reason hold not, surround us and pervade us,
 Then I am charg'd with untold and untellable wisdom, I am silent,
 I require nothing further ;
 I cannot answer the question of appearances, or that of identity
 beyond the grave ;
 But I walk or sit indifferent, I am satisfied ;
 He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me.”¹

Finally, *The Base of all Metaphysics* is—

“ The dear love of man for his comrade, the attraction of friend to
 friend ;
 Of the well-married husband and wife ; of children and parents ;
 Of city for city, and land for land.”²

As with all the “ profound saviours of every land and age,” Whitman’s first and last words to mankind are : “ Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ”; this, and this only, is the foundation and the essence of all religions and all philosophies.

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 101.

² *Ibid*, p. 102.

III.

“DRUM TAPS”

THE war of 1861–65, between the Federal Government and the Southern Confederacy, was the most important period of Whitman’s life.

In *Specimen Days* he narrated the story of the outburst of patriotic feeling in the North—the confident anticipations of easily suppressing what at first appears to have been mistaken for something of but little more consequence than a riot—the battle of Bull Run; and the feeling of stupor in the North consequent upon the result of that engagement; and the reaction following the defiant attitude of the great New York dailies.

The enthusiasm—for the war—aroused in New York is powerfully drawn in *First, O Songs for a Prelude!*¹ The forcible call to arms, *Beat! Beat! Drums!*² was probably inspired by recollections of the same circumstances.

In December, 1862, at the battle of Fredericksburgh, Whitman’s brother George, a captain (subsequently lieutenant-colonel) in the 51st New York Volunteers, received a wound in the face,³ and the poet, having

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 219.

² *Ibid.*, p. 222.

³ *Prose*, p. 71: “My brother, George W. Whitman—in active service all through, four years, re-enlisting twice—was promoted, step by step (several times immediately after battles), lieutenant, captain, major, and lieut.-colonel—was in the actions at Roanoke, Newbern, 2d. Bull

hurried South to look after his brother, was now introduced to experiences which made a lasting impression upon his mind. After being at the front but a very short time, he realised that, for the present, the work of his life lay with the army, in the hospitals and camps.

Whitman's prose work, *Specimen Days*, up to the end of 1865, is mainly a record of his experiences and impressions in and about the military camps and hospitals. Some of the writing of this record is simple and commonplace; at times it is powerful, often pathetic, and occasionally even sublime.

“To anyone dying, thither I speed and twist the knob of the door ;
Turn the bedclothes toward the foot of the bed ;
Let the physician and priest go home !
I seize the descending man and raise him with resistless will ;
O despainer, here is my neck ;
By God, you shall not go down ! hang your whole weight upon
me !
I dilate you with tremendous breath ; I buoy you up ;
Every room of the house I fill with an arm'd force ;
Lovers of me, bafflers of graves.”¹

Whitman first published the above lines in 1855 ; in 1863-4-5 he was living them. The ideal, so strenuously insisted upon in the poems grouped as *Calamus*, of “intense and loving comradeship, the personal and passionate attachment of man to man,”² now becomes the familiar atmosphere of every-day life.

Apart from such revelations of his movements in those years as Whitman has given us in *Specimen Days*, we have a more intimate account of his life in

Run, Chantilly, South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburgh, Vicksburgh, Jackson, the bloody conflicts of the Wilderness, and at Spottsylvania, Cold Harbor, and afterwards around Petersburgh.”

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 66.

² *Prose*, p. 239.

The Wound Dresser,¹ a collection of letters written by the poet from the camps and hospitals. Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, quoting a letter from *Specimen Days*²—written by Whitman to the mother of a young soldier who had died after an amputation—remarks: “If you are of the weeping order of mankind, you will certainly find your eyes fill with tears, of which you have no reason to be ashamed.”³ We may use precisely the same words with reference to the letters included in *The Wound Dresser*. They are simple and natural; no conscious appeal to the emotions of an audience; no word-painting, no straining after effect; just the every-day words that “a patient, helpful, reverent man, full of kind speeches”⁴ writes to his mother and other relatives, and nearly every page may draw tears. These letters also reveal the peculiarly close affection which the poet bore for his immediate relatives—his brothers and sisters and their children, and, of course, his mother:—

In my visits to the hospitals I found it was in the simple matter of personal presence, and emanating ordinary cheer and magnetism, that I succeeded, and help’d, more than by medical nursing, or delicacies, or gifts of money, or anything else. During the war I possess’d the perfection of physical health. My habit, when practicable, was to prepare for starting out on one of those daily or nightly tours of from a couple to four or five hours, by fortifying myself with previous rest, the bath, clean clothes, a good meal, and as cheerful an appearance as possible.⁵

In 1865, after Whitman had been dismissed from a post he had held in the public service, at Washington,

¹ Edited by Dr. R. M. Bucke.

² *Prose*, p. 264.

³ *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Prose*, p. 32.

for being the author of *Leaves of Grass*,¹ his friend, Mr. William Douglas O'Connor, published an exposulatory pamphlet, entitled *The Good Gray Poet*,² from which work we quote the following sentences:—

Usually his plan is to pass, with haversack strapped across his shoulder, from cot to cot, distributing small gifts; his theory is that these men, far from home, lonely, sick at heart, need more than anything some practical token that they are not forsaken; that someone feels a fatherly or brotherly interest in them; hence, he gives them what he can; to particular cases, entirely penniless, he distributes small sums of money, fifteen cents, twenty cents, thirty cents, fifty cents, not much in each case, for there are many; but under the circumstances these little sums are and mean a great deal. He also distributes and directs envelopes; gives a letter, paper, postage stamps, tobacco, apples, figs, sweet biscuit, preserves, blackberries; gets delicate food for special cases; sometimes a dish of oysters, or a dainty piece of meat, or some savoury morsel for some poor creature who loathes the hospital fare, but whose appetite may be tempted. In the hot weather he buys boxes of oranges, and distributes them, grateful to lips baked with fever.....he buys whatever luxuries his limited resources will allow, and he makes them go as far as he can. Where does he get the means for this expenditure? For Walt Whitman is poor; he is poor, and has a right to be proud of his poverty; for it is the sacred, the ancient, the immemorial poverty of goodness and genius. He gets the means by writing for newspapers; he expends all he gets upon his boys, his darlings, the sick and maimed soldiers. He adds to his own earnings the contributions of noble souls, often strangers, who.....have heard that such a man walks the hospitals, and who volunteer to send him this assistance; when at last he gets a place under Government.....he has a salary which he spends in the same way; sometimes his wrung heart gets the better of

¹ See Chapter VI.

² Reprinted in the Appendix to Part I. of *Walt Whitman*, by Dr. R. M. Bucke.

his prudence, and he spends till he himself is in difficulties. He gives all his money, he gives all his time, he gives all his love.¹

And elsewhere :—

Now realise a man without worldly inducement, without reward, from love and compassion only.....foregoing pleasure and rest for vigils, as in chambers of torture, among the despairing, the mangled, the dying, the forms upon which shell and rifle and sabre have wrought every bizarre atrocity of mutilation ; immuring himself in the air of their sighs, their moans, the mutter and scream of their delirium ; breathing the stench of their putrid wounds; taking up his part and lot with them, living a life of privation and denial, and hoarding his scanty means for the relief and mitigation of their anguish. That man is Walt Whitman.²

From Mr. Donaldson’s book we make the following extract, only regretting that we have not space to quote the entire chapter :—

From cot to cot they called him, often in tremulous tones or whispers ; they embraced him ; they touched his hand ; they gazed at him. To one he gave a few words of cheer ; for another he wrote a letter home ; to others he gave an orange, a few comfits, a cigar, pipe, or tobacco, a sheet of paper, or a postage stamp ; all of which, and many other things, were in his capacious haversack. From another he would receive a dying message for mother, wife, or sweetheart ; for another he would promise to go an errand ; to another, some special friend, he would give a manly, farewell kiss. He seemed to leave a benediction at every cot as he passed along. The lights had gleamed for hours in that hospital that night before he left it ; and as he took his way toward the door you could hear the voice of many a stricken hero calling “Walt! Walt! Walt! come again ! come again !”³

¹ *The Good Gray Poet*, by W. D. O’Connor.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Walt Whitman, the Man.*

The following quotation from *Specimen Days* sums up Whitman's experiences of these years :—

During those three years in hospital, camp, or field, I made over six hundred visits or tours; and went, as I estimate, counting all, among from eighty thousand to a hundred thousand of the wounded and sick, as sustainer of spirit and body in some degree, in time of need. These visits varied from an hour or two to all day or night; for with dear or critical cases I generally watch'd all night. Sometimes I took up my quarters in the hospital, and slept or watch'd there several nights in succession. Those three years I consider the greatest privilege and satisfaction (with all their feverish excitements and lamentable sights), and, of course the most profound lesson of my life. I can say that in my ministerings I comprehended all, whoever came in my way, Northern or Southern, and slighted none. It arous'd, and brought out, and decided undream'd of depths of emotion.¹

In his old age Whitman rarely spoke of these experiences, but he thus expressed himself to Mr. Sidney Morse :—

They were the precious hours of my life. My mother's love and the love of those dear fellows, secesh or union. It was awful, or would have been, had it not been grand. They took it all in the most matter-of-fact way. No complaining. The fate of war. One rebel boy quoted Emerson (he had been to Harvard or Yale):

“Whoever fights, whoever falls,
Justice conquers evermore.”

It seemed to me all the while not that I was away somewhere, out nursing strangers, but right at home with my own flesh and blood. So it was. No ties could be dearer than bound me to each and all of them. My heart bled hour by hour as for its own.²

Whitman's recollections of, and reflections upon, the war, comprising about a third part of the prose

¹ *Prose*, p. 71.

² *In Re Walt Whitman*.

work, *Specimen Days*, should be most valuable material for an historian of that great struggle; apart altogether from the light which they throw upon Whitman's life and character.

It has been made a ground for adverse criticism of Whitman that, with his healthy, powerful physique, and his decided opinions upon the subject of slavery, he was not moved, at the outbreak of the war, to serve “the North” as a soldier, leaving his self-imposed task of *Wound Dresser* to be undertaken by men of less robust constitution. We have gathered from *Origins of Attempted Secession*¹ and other sources that Whitman was very doubtful whether war was, or was not, a justifiable or the only way to settle the Slavery question in America; but altogether apart from this, a man's conscience may at times ask of him, “Is it better to save life or to kill?” and Whitman's answer to this question appears to us to have been the right one. Had he gone into the war as a combatant, it is possible that a few more “rebs” might have been maimed or slaughtered; but he took the better part, and devoted (and, as it ultimately proved, sacrificed) his life to the nation—which, it must not be forgotten, included both parties to the war—North and South.

Besides the work, *Specimen Days*—which, although we have frequently been told that Whitman could not write prose, we have liked the better as our familiarity with it has progressed—Whitman's experiences of the war and various matters bearing upon its history are also dwelt upon in the following prose writings:—

*Origins of Attempted Secession.*²

*Some War Memoranda.*³

*Last of the War Cases.*⁴

¹ *Prose*, p. 251. ² *Ibid*, p. 251. ³ *Ibid*, p. 418. ⁴ *Ibid*, p. 448.

His experiences of the war inspired Whitman to compose a fresh series of poems, entitled *Drum Taps*, which was published in 1865. Of these pieces some are descriptive, others martial, while many of them are dirges. Here we find the arrogant note of the original *Leaves of Grass* disappearing, and giving place to a gentler tone, which ultimately reached perfection in the solemn and magnificent poem on the death of Lincoln, *When Lilaes Last in the Door Yard Bloom'd*.¹

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 255.

IV.

WHITMAN AND LINCOLN

ONE of the results of the history of 1860-65 was to make Whitman a most enthusiastic admirer of Abraham Lincoln, whom he considered "the grandest figure yet, on all the crowded canvass of the Nineteenth Century."¹

For several years, on the anniversary of Lincoln's assassination, Whitman delivered a lecture—*The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*; the lecture, which eulogises the President, and describes the circumstances under which the murder was committed, is printed in the volume of Whitman's collected prose writings.²

The celebration of Lincoln's death (said he) is no narrow or sectional reminiscence. It belongs to these States in their entirety—not the North only, but the South—perhaps belongs more tenderly and devoutly to the South, of all; for there really this man's birth-stock; there and then his antecedent stamp. Why should I not say that thence his manliest traits, his universality, his canny, easy ways and words upon the surface—his inflexible determination at heart? Have you ever realised it, my friends, that Lincoln, though grafted on the West, was essentially, in *personnel* and character, a Southern contribution?³

Mr. Donaldson wrote:—

At the dinner given to Mr. Whitman by his personal friends in 1890, May 31, in honour of his seventieth

¹ *Prose*, p. 438.

² *Prose*, p. 301.

³ *Reminiscences of Walt Whitman*, by William Sloane Kennedy.

birthday, Julian Hawthorn said that he liked Whitman best for the fact of his friendship and personal love of Mr. Lincoln. Mr. Hawthorne had been misinformed. Mr. Whitman never talked to Mr. Lincoln in his life, or Mr. Lincoln to him. Mr. Lincoln, one day in 1864, while looking out of a window of the White House, and being told that a passer-by was Walt Whitman, said, "Well, *he* looks like a MAN."¹

Again :—

Mr. Whitman used to see him—Lincoln—at a distance, watch for him, go to his receptions, and stand off and admire him. When Mr. Lincoln made a public address, Mr. Whitman was, when possible, in the audience and close up to the speaker. Yet, when he took Mr. Lincoln by the hand, he gave it a grasp and spoke no words beyond "Howdy?" and he never conversed with Mr. Lincoln.²

Whitman made several allusions to President Lincoln in *Specimen Days* :—

I see very plainly Abraham Lincoln's dark brown face, with the deep cut lines, the eyes, always to me with a deep latent sadness in the expression. We have got so that we exchange bows; and very cordial ones.....He bowed and smiled; but far beneath his smile I noticed well the expression I have alluded to. None of the artists or pictures has caught the deep, though subtle and indirect, expression of this man's face. There is something else there. One of the great portrait painters of two or three centuries ago is needed.³

Of all the days of the war there are two especially I can never forget. Those were the day following the news, in New York and Brooklyn, of that first Bull Run defeat; and the day of Abraham Lincoln's death. I was home in Brooklyn on both occasions. The day of the murder we heard the news very early in the morning. Mother prepared breakfast—and other meals afterward—as usual; but not a mouthful was eaten all day by either of us. We each drank half a cup of coffee; that was all. Little was

¹ *Walt Whitman the Man.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Prose*, pp. 37, 38.

said. We got every newspaper, morning and evening, and the frequent extras of that period, and pass'd them silently to each other.¹

Of the series of poems called *Memories of President Lincoln—When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd*,² generally admitted to be the finest of Whitman's poems, was first published in 1866. *O Captain! My Captain!*³ also published in 1866, is one of Whitman's few poems condescending to conventional style. *Hush'd be the Camps To-day*⁴ was first published with *Drum Taps* in 1865; and the verse, *This Dust was Once the Man*, was added in 1870.

Whitman's prose writings which have special reference to Lincoln are :—

Death of Abraham Lincoln (p. 301).

A Lincoln Reminiscence (p. 331).

Abraham Lincoln (p. 436).

Walt Whitman's Last Public (p. 508).

¹ *Prose*, p. 21.

³ *Ibid*, p. 262.

² *Leaves of Grass*, p. 255.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 263.

V.

WHITMAN'S RECEPTION

CONSEQUENT upon his peculiar, unconventional style of versification, as well as his straightforward utterances upon the sex question, Whitman's little volume met with no favour from the general reader; and the welcome extended to the new writer by men of letters was, to speak mildly, frigid.

It is true that Emerson tendered him cordial greetings "at the beginning of a great career." Thoreau and Alcott appear to have been introduced to *Leaves of Grass* by Emerson; and they also expressed admiration for the work. But these appear to have been Whitman's only admirers of any eminence in his own country. In 1856 Thoreau wrote :—

On the whole, it sounds to me very brave and American, after whatever deductions.....We ought to rejoice greatly in him. He occasionally suggests something a little more than human.....Since I have seen him, I find that I am not disturbed by any brag or egotism in his book. He may turn out the least of a braggart of all, having a better right to be confident. He is a great fellow.¹

I spoke of Whitman and his poetry. Emerson said that when Whitman came to Boston in the Spring of 1860, to print there an edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he asked Longfellow, Holmes, and Lowell whether he should invite Whitman to the Saturday Club, as he would gladly have

¹ *Walt Whitman*, by Dr. R. M. Bucke.

done. But they declared no wish to meet him, so he was not asked. I remembered, but did not recall the fact to his mind, that Alcott, Emerson, and Thoreau all wished to invite Whitman to Concord; but neither Mrs. Alcott, Mrs. Emerson, nor Sophia Thoreau was willing to meet him; so the invitation was not given. In 1881 he came to visit me in Concord; and Emerson, Alcott, and Louisa Alcott all met him at my house; the next day Mrs. Emerson invited him to dinner; and we all dined together there.¹

I remember walking with Mr. Lowell once in Cambridge, when he pointed out a doorway sign, *Groceries*, with the letters set zigzag, to produce a bizarre effect. "That," said he, "is Walt Whitman—with very common goods inside."²

A writer in the Philadelphia *Conservator* (October, 1903) stated that "Whitman had no bitterer or more unfair enemy than Lowell."

Longfellow visited Whitman at Camden in 1878, and Whitman returned the courtesy at Boston in 1881; and in 1885 Holmes was a subscriber to Whitman's horse and buggy; but we have had no means of ascertaining the sentiments expressed late in life (if any) by either Holmes or Longfellow with respect to *Leaves of Grass*.³

Whitman told Mr. Donaldson that Whittier was said—after reading *Leaves of Grass*—to have thrown the book into the fire.⁴ In 1885, when Whitman's friends presented him with a horse and buggy, Whittier was one of the subscribers, though pointedly avowing his disapproval of much that Whitman had written.

¹ F. B. Sanborn, in the *Arena*, December, 1895.

² J. T. Trowbridge, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1902.

³ In his book, *Over the Tea-cups*, Holmes refers to Whitman in a playful manner, but pronounces no serious opinion upon *Leaves of Grass*.

⁴ *Walt Whitman the Man.*

On the eastern shore of the Atlantic Whitman found a life-long friend in Mr. William Michael Rossetti.

Certain copies of *Leaves of Grass* fell—in 1856—into the hands of Thomas Dixon, a well-known native of Sunderland, to whom Ruskin wrote the famous letters ultimately published as *Time and Tide by Wear and Tyne*. Thomas Dixon sent three of the copies to William Bell Scott—the well-known poet and artist—who, at once perceiving the unique quality of the book, sent forthwith one copy, which has become in its way historical, to William Michael Rossetti.¹

Mr. Scott recommended Mr. Rossetti to—
read as one does the books that express human life, like
the Bible—books that have aggregated rather than been
written—and one finds these *Leaves of Grass* grow up in a
wonderful manner. The book is very like an opening into
quite a new poetic condition.²

In 1868 Mr. Rossetti edited the first British selection from *Leaves of Grass*. In his “Prefatory Notice” he wrote :—

I believe that Whitman is one of the huge, as yet mainly unrecognised, forces of our time; privileged to evoke, in a country hitherto still asking for its poet, a fresh, athletic, and American poetry; and predestined to be traced up to by generation after generation of believing and ardent—let us hope not servile—disciples.....His voice will one day be potential or magisterial wherever the English language is spoken; that is to say, in the four corners of the earth; and in his own American atmosphere the uttermost avatars of democracy will confess him not more their announcer than their inspirer.³

In 1869 a copy of Mr. Rossetti's selection fell into

¹ Introduction to Whitman volume of the *Canterbury Poets*, by Ernest Rhys.

² Ruskin; Rossetti; Pre-Raphaelite Papers.

³ Poems by Walt Whitman: Introduction by W. M. Rossetti.

the hands of Mrs. Gilchrist, the writer—in collaboration with her husband, Alexander Gilchrist—of a life of William Blake.

Mrs. Gilchrist, having heard nothing but ill words of the poems, opened the book with feelings partly of indifference, partly of antagonism. But as she read she became conscious of a new and most powerful influence affecting her. "I can read no other book," she wrote Rossetti a fortnight later. "It holds me entirely spell-bound, and I go through it again and again with deepening delight and wonder."¹

These friendly readers—Mrs. Gilchrist and Mr. Rossetti—made a nucleus of a Whitman cult in England, which has gradually increased in extent until the poet's position and influence in English literature has become assured.

The literature of which Whitman's writings constitute the subject-matter is very extensive. He has been abused vigorously, and even cruelly, in many of the periodicals on either side of the Atlantic; and the most noticeable feature of adverse criticisms of Whitman's writings is that they are generally true: we candidly admit the charges; we cannot deny them. We confess, without hesitation, to deriving the greatest enjoyment, the keenest possible satisfaction, from witnessing a bombardment of *Leaves of Grass* with the heavy artillery of adverse conventional literary criticism. But we have invariably found that this—however clever or unjust it may be—cannot in any wise injure Whitman's position: the cessation of the cannonade, and the clearing away of the smoke, only reveal Walt and his *Leaves of Grass* standing, not only uninjured, but actually

¹ Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman.

strengthened. Whitman himself feared more harm from his friends than from his enemies.

"I call to the world to distrust the accounts of my friends, but listen to my enemies, as I myself do."¹

But although, from the first, the book, *Leaves of Grass*, was unfashionable, unliterary, and—financially—unsuccessful, Whitman was never at a loss for friends to stand up for him; the *Study* of Whitman, by the American nature-lover, Mr. John Burroughs, is almost too extravagant in its appreciation of the poet; and both in America and Europe Whitman's work has been eulogised, justified, and defended by a large number of eminent—as well as obscure—writers. So that, while at first he was confronted with the hostility of almost the entire literary world, since his death—and, indeed, for several years before that event—he has been generally regarded as a real, vital, and permanent force in literature. Indeed, it is scarcely possible to read any American verse of the last few years in which the influence of *Leaves of Grass* is not perceptible; at times we have even found Whitman's own phrases and lines used; his peculiar style of versification has been made use of by several recent American poets;² and the well-known English writer, Mr. Edward Carpenter, has written the whole of the collection of poems which he named *Towards Democracy* in this same free, untrammelled style. So it would appear that already Whitman's lines, *Poets to Come*,³ are being justified.

Much of Whitman's life had been stormy. He lived to see the storm dying, if not dead. He never doubted of

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 190.

² E.g., Ernest Crosby, Horace L. Traubel, C. F. Johnson.

³ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 18.

final acceptance. But he was scarcely prepared to have positive evidences of recognition appear in his lifetime. "The world moves at a faster pace than of old," he reflected; "its instruments of movement are prompt and numerous; the harvest is hastened." I remember that he avowed himself in this way: "I am here at last. From 1855 until the last few years I wondered if I had yet arrived. I am here to stay."¹

Quotations from *Leaves of Grass* may be found in many books; and, although the majority of the writers of Whitman's own generation failed to understand him, yet a younger generation recognised his greatness, to which numerous tributes have been forthcoming from eminent writers, not only in England and America, but in other countries also.

Extracts from *Leaves of Grass* are usually published in miscellaneous selections of poetry, both English and American. Not so very many years ago Whitman was either unknown or treated as a negligible quantity in England; and it was customary to publish selections from the American poets with Whitman studiously ignored; yet now—to such an extent has opinion changed—any selection of American poetry without a substantial selection from *Leaves of Grass* would be almost analogous to "playing Hamlet with Hamlet omitted."

¹ H. L. Traubel, in the *Arena*, January, 1896.

VI.

CONCLUSION

A SECOND issue of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1856, and a third in 1860.

In 1863, when Whitman was working in the military hospitals in Washington, his friend, Mr. Trowbridge, asked the Hon. Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, to give him (Whitman) employment in his department; but Mr. Chase refused.

He had understood that Whitman was a rowdy—one of the roughs—according to his description of himself. I said “he is as quiet a gentleman in his manners and conversation as any guest who enters your door.” He replied: “I am bound to believe what you say; but his writings have given him a bad repute; and I should not know what sort of a place to give to such a man”—with more to the same effect.¹

Subsequently Whitman procured an appointment in the Department of the Interior; but at the end of June, 1865, he was dismissed from his position by the Hon. James Harlan, the Secretary of the Interior, for being the author of *Leaves of Grass*, which Mr. Harlan characterised as “full of indecent passages.”² This tyrannical act of the minister drew from Whitman’s friend and admirer, William Douglas O’Connor, the pamphlet entitled *The Good Gray Poet*,

¹ J. T. Trowbridge, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1902.

² *The Good Gray Poet*, p. 101.

in which the theory of *Leaves of Grass* is powerfully upheld and Mr. Harlan's conduct indignantly denounced.

I claim that to expel an author from a public office, and subject him to public contumely, solely because he has published a book which no one can declare immoral without declaring all the grand books immoral, is to affix a penalty to thought, and to obstruct the freedom of letters. I declare this act the audacious captain of a series of acts, and a style of opinions whose tendency and effect throughout Christendom is to dwarf and degrade literature, and to make great books impossible except under pains of martyrdom. As such I arraign it before every liberal and thoughtful mind. I denounce it as a sinister precedent; as a ban upon the free action of genius; as a logical insult to all-commanding literature; and as in every way a most serious wrong.¹

Probably but for this incident Mr. Harlan's name would have sunk into well-merited oblivion; but he earned an unenviable notoriety by perpetrating an ill-considered act of petty tyranny.

Immediately after his dismissal Whitman was given an appointment in the office of the Attorney General, the Hon. James Speed. In this position he continued until 1873; issuing, at intervals, further editions of his writings. His health appears to have been indifferent most of the time. In 1864 he had been laid up with "hospital malaria," the result "of poison absorbed by his system assisting at the amputation of the gangrened limb of a Virginia Union soldier to whom he was much attached."² From this illness he never recovered.

He wrote to his mother, June 10th, 1864: "The doctor tells me I have continued too long in the

¹ *The Good Gray Poet*, p. 129.

In Re Walt Whitman.

hospitals, especially in a very bad place, Armoury Building, where the worst wounds were, and have absorbed too much of the virus into my system.”¹ A few days later he wrote: “It is probable that the hospital poison has affected my system; and I find it worse than I calculated.”²

In 1873 he was attacked by paralysis in the left side; and, being unfit for work, he left Washington, and retired to Camden, New Jersey, where, after the sudden death of his mother (March, 1873), his illness became worse.

For several years Whitman was completely disabled, and in 1873, 1874, and 1875 he did not issue any further editions of his writings. But in 1876 his health was sufficiently restored to enable him to superintend the publication of his *Centennial* issue of *Leaves of Grass*; also a volume entitled *Two Rivulets*, consisting of alternate pieces of prose and verse.

I found Whitman much crippled and quieter in manner than when we met before. Eleven years had wrought their changes. He was, however, in a less perturbed frame of mind. In 1876 he had not the returns from his volumes sent to England, and was undoubtedly poor enough in pocket, and, as he said, “disposed occasionally to feel blue.” He was at that time quartered with his brother. He came in, as I remember, with something of a disheartened air, but presently was speaking in cheeriest tones. “Whatever happens, I quite believe in the old world. Take it for all and all, for better or for worse, in sickness or in health, I cleave to it.” He now—1887—recalled that day of our first meeting, and said: “I believe that must have been about the darkest period of my life; but before the summer had gone there came that burst of sunlight over the sea. The money, and the friendliness of it all, turned the tide and made me about the happiest

¹ *The Wound Dresser*, p. 196.

² *Ibid*, p. 197.

critter that ever lived. I felt *too* good almost. I wondered if I could stand it. It was worth living for, anyway, if I then died outright. For evermore I shall love old England. It all comes over me now, and always does when I think of it, like a great succouring love. You should have seen the tears, Sidney—or you shouldn't. With no discounting of friends at home, I must say that English business stands apart in my thought from all else.¹

In 1876 Whitman had the pleasure of becoming personally acquainted with Mrs. Anne Gilchrist and her children, who visited Philadelphia for the purpose of seeing the Centennial Exhibition. The Gilchrists remained in America for three years, during which time Whitman saw them frequently. Whitman remembered Mrs. Gilchrist to his dying day, and never missed an opportunity of expressing his admiration of her fine character and his gratitude for her disinterested friendship to himself.

Some of Mrs. Gilchrist's most "beautiful, characteristic, and copious" letters were, according to the *Athenaeum*, written to her great American friend, Walt Whitman. These the poet kept sacred to his dying day. On being appealed to by Herbert Gilchrist to give them, or parts of them, for publication in the biography of his mother, he said he could not furnish any good reason, but he felt to keep these utterances exclusively to himself.²

At this time (1876), also, he became acquainted personally with Mr. Edward Carpenter, the author of *Towards Democracy*, who "came to America mainly for the purpose of seeing Mr. Whitman."³

During these years of sickness and of partial recovery Whitman spent a great deal of his time

¹ Sidney Morse, *In Re Walt Whitman*.

² Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman.

³ Anne Gilchrist: *Her Life and Writings*.

in the open air. His favourite and chief place of resort was a—

charmingly recluse and rural spot along Timber Creek, twelve or thirteen miles from where it enters the Delaware River. Domicil'd at the house of my friends, the Staffords, near by, I lived half the time along this creek and its adjacent fields and lanes. And it is to my life here that I perhaps owe partial recovery (a sort of second wind, or semi-renewal of the lease of life) from the prostration of 1874-75.¹

In June, 1878, Whitman was present—at New York City—at the funeral of William Cullen Bryant. Referring to this incident, he wrote :—

I had known Mr. Bryant over thirty years ago, and he had been markedly kind to me. Off and on, along that time for years as they pass'd, we met and chatted together. I thought him very sociable in his way, and a man to become attach'd to. We were both walkers, and when I work'd in Brooklyn he several times came over, middle of afternoons, and we took rambles, miles long, till dark, out towards Bedford or Flatbush, in company. On these occasions he gave me clear accounts of scenes in Europe—the cities, architecture, art, especially Italy—where he had travel'd a good deal.²

Mr. Bryant does not appear to have expressed any opinion (that is, any to which publicity has been given) respecting Whitman's writings.

Afterwards Whitman visited his friend, Mr. John Burroughs, "on the West bank of the Hudson, eighty miles north of New York";³ and in April-May, 1879, he spent nearly two months visiting friends in the neighbourhood of New York, including another visit to Mr. Burroughs. In September, 1879, he travelled as far west as Denver, in Colorado;

¹ *Prose*, p. 75.

² *Ibid*, p. 107.

³ *Ibid*, p. 108.

on his way home he was laid up for a time in St. Louis; but he eventually returned to Camden with his health greatly benefited by the trip. His health was now fairly set up; and in the following year he was able to pay a prolonged visit to his friend, Dr. R. M. Bucke, at London, Ontario, and to make quite extensive journeys in Southern and Eastern Canada.¹

In 1881 Messrs. J. R. Osgood & Co., of Boston, published the seventh issue of *Leaves of Grass*; but, being threatened with prosecution by the Government of Massachusetts, they abandoned the publication. In the following year, however, Whitman arranged with Rees, Welsh, & Co. (afterwards David McKay), of Philadelphia, to publish his works; and the eighth issue appeared in 1882; also the prose volume, *Specimen Days and Collect*.

In 1881 Whitman visited Boston and delivered his lecture on Abraham Lincoln; he remained in Boston about three weeks; and "it was well I got away in fair order; for if I had stayed another week I should have been killed with kindness and with eating and drinking."² In July of the same year he visited New York and Long Island. In the following October he visited his old friend, Mr. F. B. Sanborn, at Concord (Massachusetts).

Whitman's rambles were now at an end; he spent the remaining years of his life at Camden in a house in Mickle Street, which he purchased in 1884. In August, 1885, Whitman's "infirmities increasing, and his out-door locomotion being prevented thereby,"

¹ Mr. William Sloane Kennedy proposes to publish Whitman's Diary in Canada.

² *Prose*, p. 175.

a horse and buggy were subscribed for and presented to the poet by thirty-two American friends. "The horse and buggy were sold in 1888 by Mr. Whitman after he had become too infirm to move about unaided. They had been a source of joy and comfort to him, and aided him to pass three years of an invalid's life in comparative ease. Scores of times he expressed his gratitude for the gift, as it gave him touches of life, and air, and scenery, otherwise impossible."¹

In 1887 a Bill was introduced into Congress to provide Whitman with a pension. In the report on the Bill many references were made to Whitman's services in the hospitals. The passing of the Bill "was chiefly prevented by Mr. Whitman. His pecuniary condition had changed—and for the better. He was not a dependent, and did not want to be so considered. Therefore the Bill, although favourably reported to the House of Representatives, was not pressed."²

Although, after 1883, Whitman's physical health became greatly impaired, and in 1888 he was attacked by a severe illness to which he nearly succumbed, yet he still continued to write a few lines now and then. In 1888 he published a series of poems entitled *Sands at Seventy*; in 1891, *Good-Bye, My Faney*; and after his death his literary executors published a collection of thirteen short pieces which Whitman himself had named *Old-Age Echoes*. All these additions were subsequently bound up with his earlier works and published as *Leaves of Grass*.

¹ *Walt Whitman the Man*, chapter ix.

² *Ibid.*

On his seventieth birthday (May 31st, 1889) Whitman was present at a banquet given in his honour by his Camden friends. The speakers included R. W. Gilder, Julian Hawthorne, and Hamlin Garland; an account of the function was afterwards published by Mr. Horace Traubel, as *Camden's Compliment to Walt Whitman*. Mr. Traubel also published a large number of congratulatory letters and telegrams from Whitman's friends and admirers, including Lord Tennyson, Henry Irving, W. M. Rossetti, William Morris, Professor Dowden, Edward Carpenter, Colonel John Hay, John Burroughs, R. G. Ingersoll, E. C. Stedman, W. D. Howells, J. G. Whittier, Mark Twain, Will Carleton, J. A. Symonds, and T. B. Aldrich.

On his seventy-second birthday (May 31st, 1891) thirty-three of his friends entertained the poet at a dinner in his own home at Camden; messages of congratulation were read from Lord Tennyson, the Hon. Roden Noel, Professor Dowden, John Burroughs, Moncure D. Conway, R. H. Dana, Ernest Rhys, Hamlin Garland, and others. Notes of the proceedings were taken, and afterwards published by Mr. Traubel.¹

During the first years of his illness Whitman was in very poor circumstances; but latterly, owing to the increased demand for his books and the kindness of his many friends (who were determined that while the poet lived he should want for nothing), he lived—not in luxury perhaps—but certainly very comfortably.

His friends were legion, and varied from the very

¹ *In Re Walt Whitman.*

poor to the wealthy, and from the obscure to the famous. Among the latter were some of the most eminent men of letters of the time.

After a long and painful illness, endured with characteristic fortitude, during which he was tended by the most devoted of nurses and friends, Walt Whitman died on March 26th, 1892.

“At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerfully fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep of the well-
closed doors,
Let me be wafted.
Let me glide noiselessly forth,
With the key of softness unlock the locks—with a whisper
Set ope the doors, O soul.”¹

¹ *Leaves of Grass*, p. 346.

APPENDIX No. I.

*Names Given to Certain of WHITMAN'S Poems by MR. WILLIAM
MICHAEL ROSSETTI.*

<i>Rossetti.</i>	<i>Whitman.</i>
After the War.	To the Leaven'd Soil they Trod.
American Feuillage. Assimilations.	Our Old Feuillage. There was a Child Went Forth.
Appearances.	Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances.
Auxiliaries.	What Place is Besieged ?
Burial.	To Think of Time.
Centuries Hence.	Full of Life Now.
The City of Friends.	I Dreamed in a Dream.
The Dark Side.	I Sit and Look Out.
A Dream.	Of Him I Love Day and Night.
Elemental Drifts.	As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life.
Envy.	When I Peruse the Con- quered Fame.
The Friend.	Recorders Ages Hence.
Fit Audience.	Whoever You Are, Holding Me Now in Hand.
Flux.	Of These Years I Sing.
A Grave.	As Toilsome I Wander'd Virginia's Woods.
Greatnesses.	Great are the Myths.
A Letter From Camp.	Come Up From the Fields, Father.

<i>Rossetti.</i>	<i>Whitman.</i>
Links.	Think of the Soul.
Longings for Home.	O Magnet, South.
Love of Comrades.	For You, O Democracy.
Manhattan Arming.	First, O Songs, for a Prelude.
Manhattan Faces.	Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun.
Meeting Again.	When I Heard at the Close of the Day.
The Mother of All Music.	Pensive, On Her Dead Gazing.
Music.	I Heard yon, Solemn Sweet Pipes of the Organ.
Nearing Departure.	As the Time Draws Nigh.
Night and Death.	Night on the Prairies.
Other Lands.	This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful.
Out of the Crowd.	Out of the Rolling Ocean, the Crowd.
Parting Friends.	What Think you I Take My Pen in Hand.
The Past-Present.	I was Looking for a Long While.
The Poet.	Song of the Answerer.
President Lincoln's Funeral Hymn.	When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd.
Pulse of my Life.	Not Heaving from My Ribb'd Breast Only.
Questionable.	As I lay with My Head in Your Lap, Camerado.
Realities.	As I Walk These Broad Majestic Days.
A Ship.	Aboard, at a Ship's Helm.
Similitude.	On the Beach, at Night, Alone.
Singers and Poets.	Song of the Answerer (Sec. 2).
Singing in Spring.	These, I, Singing in Spring.

<i>Rossetti.</i>	<i>Whitman.</i>
The Square Deific. Survivors. The Bivouac's Flame.	Chanting the Square Deific. How Solemn, as One by One. By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame.
To the Sayers of Words. The Uprising.	Song of the Rolling Earth. Rise, O Days, from Your Fathomless Depths.
Vigil on the Field.	Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night.
Visages. The Waters. Wherefore ? Whosoever. A Word Out of the Sea.	Of the Visages of Things. The World Below the Brine. O Me ! O Life ! To You. Out of the Cradle, Endlessly Rocking.
Wonders.	Who Learns My Lesson Complete.
The Wounded.	A March in the Ranks, Hard Prest.

APPENDIX No. II.

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“From the Library of R. L. Stevenson, Vailima. Given to me by Mr. Gurr, in April, 1898, at Vailima; and by me to Mr. W. H. Trimble, on December 19th, 1903.

“D. COLQUHOUN, M.D., Dunedin.”

Mr. Horace L. Traubel proposes to publish—by subscription—a reprint of this edition, with facsimile of Whitman’s corrections and marginal notes (in black ink, and pencils of various colours) superimposed on the text.

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